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**Defining Regionalism through Genres: Situating Gujarati Identity in India  
through Urban Music Culture**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Music**

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## Abstract

This dissertation aims to examine the different kinds of agency gained from a regional Gujarati voice for middle class individuals in urban areas of Gujarat, India that are dominated by pan-(North) Indian popular music. Beginning with the use of music during the time of Indian Independence, and exploring the effect of Gandhi's own Gujarati background, through the movement of Gujarati statehood, I consider the modern historical context of a regional voice in Gujarat and its social and cultural implications. By studying a genre called *sugam sangeet* (a term that essentially translates to music that is likeable and that is also known as "light classical music"), I explore the development of "new" Gujarati music during the twentieth century. I also analyze how identity is constructed through musical composition and performance, particularly as genres such as Hindustani classical and folk musics intersect.

Based on the intersection of genres, I consider music as a social delegator that determines how listeners interact with the different identities enacted in the sounds and lyrics of Gujarati music. I deliberate the significance of the various ways that music is listened to, such as social media, the Internet, radio, television, small and large concerts, and music festivals, to understand how place has a role in the interactive processes of music that create meaning for listeners. Using Surat, a city in southeastern Gujarat, as my ethnographic base, I examine how listeners of Gujarati music affect the production and consumption of Gujarati music and the space that Gujarati language occupies in the urban setting. Within this setting, I consider how a regional voice provides a catalyst for socially-based







dialogue of topics such as current issues and gender-based issues. I particularly examine the relational role of males and females in urban, middle class Gujarat, as I explore the performance of women's music.

While exploring the dynamic role of music in urban Gujarat, I deliberate notions of "tradition" and "modernity," while demonstrating the importance of a regional voice in a space where a nationalized cultural history and popular mass mediated musics have dominated middle class understanding of music culture.





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# Chapter One – Situating the Significance of a Regional Voice

## *Project, Goal, and Method*

I am interested in examining the different kinds of agency gained from creating a localized, Gujarati voice, in an urban, musical space that is dominated by pan-(North) Indian popular music, by the various individuals in middle class, Gujarati society who create and listen to music. Of particular interest is how identity constructed within the music itself, through salient features such as the topics discussed in the lyrics and the kinds of musical sounds produced, leads to the assertion of Gujarati regionalism. I am also interested in how this regional voice can be used as a tool for less dominant voices in urban, middle class society, such as women, as a way for them to express social issues.

I conducted fieldwork in the major, western cities of Gujarat, India for a doctoral dissertation on Gujarati music culture. As a diasporic, female Gujarati, born and raised in the United States and undertaking graduate studies in Canada, I believe that I am in a unique position to study Gujarati music as a cultural insider and societal outsider. Having been raised by two generations of first generation diasporic Gujaratis, I have a unique temporal insight into Gujarati culture through the personal histories from which I draw my native understanding. I am interested in working with middle class, urban musicians, who are relatively financially equivalent to the diasporic counterparts whom I am familiar with, in





order to gain an understanding of the current, urban musical culture in Gujarati cities.

This project is significant because it explores music South Asian music culture in a way that has not yet been extensively investigated. The relationship between middle class individuals and musical cultures have been investigated by scholars who are researching topics of nationalism in the current musical culture in India (Bakhle 2005, Weidman 2006); however, Gujarat has not been studied thus far. Gujarati music has been a prevalent part of the culture; however, it was rather diverse and stratified for much of its history, especially in the case of religious and folk music traditions, which varied widely based on familial and caste-based traditions. The public culture of Gujarati music blossomed tremendously during the time of Indian Independence. The effect of Gandhi's social reforms on life patterns was felt differently by Gujaratis, for whom the Independence movement was localized and personal as a result of Gandhi's own Gujarati background and his residence in Ahmedabad.

Important events that were part of the movement for Indian Independence occurred in Gujarat, such as the Salt March, where Gandhi and those who chose to participate with him, walked over 240 miles along eastern Gujarat from the Sabarmati Ashram until they reached the coastline at Dandi in a campaign to resist British taxation and to protest against the British monopoly over salt. Singing was one of the ways that those who marched kept their spirits during the





long ordeal; Gandhi's favorite *bhajan*<sup>1</sup> (Hindu devotional song). Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram, was most frequently sung during the March, and the melody that was sung then, which is still very popular today, was composed by Vishnu Digambar Paluskar.

As a result, a crucial research question that I am interested in further developing is how the independence movement during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century affected the musical lives of individuals. Through previous study and firsthand conversations with individuals that were involved in the movement, I know that the role of public and private musical practices played an important role. *Bhajans* were frequently sung in Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, and women became involved in the movement through the urging of Kasturba, Gandhi's wife, and through the singing of *deshbhakti sangeet* (patriotic music). This project is significant for me because some of my own family friends, from the generation of my grandparents, were involved in this movement. I was raised in a progressive Gujarati household full of educated women and equal-partnership in marriage, as well as the teachings of the independence movement, many of which were conveyed orally through bhajans, songs, and stories.

Most middle class Gujaratis do not consider music to be a noble profession; however, they are particularly fond of music that promotes Gujarati culture through the use of language. I believe that studying music in this area will promote cross-cultural interaction and mutual understanding, and I plan to this

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<sup>1</sup> All recurring Gujarati and musical terms will be italicized and defined during their first discussion in the text and included in a glossary.



study by learning how to discuss music and conduct fieldwork in a culture that is musical but that does not necessarily promote professional musicianhood. I am interested in investigating how this urban, Gujarati musical culture, with large contingents of amateur musicians (as well as complex notions of musical pluralism), defines itself.

As I was exploring preliminary research possibilities, I became interested in the topic of women's musical traditions. During the 20th century, the practice and transmission of Indian classical music underwent great transformation through the work of individuals like Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, as well as through the influence of social, political, and religious changes within the Subcontinent. In Maharashtra and Gujarat, institutions, such as schools, music societies, and religious movements, brought music to an emerging middle class and emphasized the importance of formal education and musical training for women. In Maharashtra, Paluskar distributed pamphlets, which stated that there were "emotional, physical, societal, and religious" benefits to women learning music (Bakhle 2005).

As I began the research for this project, I considered how musical training provided women with a sonic space through which they could exercise authority in a time and place where men dominated the ability to make religious and political decisions in society. I also explored how women were able to strategically express their personal ideologies regarding cultural and social change, through the musical repertoire that they performed and through the transmission of music to their children. Finally, I examined the degree to which





these musical practices established women as upholders of socially-based religious ideology through a repertoire of music that has now become associated with women's musical traditions. Although I have chosen to focus on women as a specific social group to further explore within urban Gujarati music culture, I believe that these types of questions would apply to other subgroups that exist within the mainstream of urban Gujarati society.

During my fieldwork, which was conducted during the 2009 – 2010 academic year, I considered Delhi as my academic base, and I considered Surat, my mother's hometown, as my cross-cultural hometown. From here, I engaged with the musical community in Surat to understand how music affects the lives of Surti individuals, with a special interest in women.

My methodology involved beginning with individuals who I was already acquainted with, friends and family members, and explaining my project to establish ties between myself and those within the community who consume, produce, or support musical activities. I was interested in this insider approach, through oral sources, because I wanted to understand Gujarati culture through the individuals that practice and promote this culture. The main objective for my gathering of information was to determine how music is heard in Gujarat by urban Gujaratis.



## *The Paradox of Neither Being Insider or Outsider*

Not having been born and raised in Gujarat, I am not considered a complete insider and have an outsider vantage to the society itself; however, I am not considered to be an outsider because my (extended) family and family friends still live in Gujarat. The paradox of this insider/outsider perspective is that information was sometimes difficult to attain. I did not always have the resources that an insider would, but I also could not ask the kind of broad questions that an outsider would be able to begin research with; when I attempted the latter, I was often questioned why I did not know information that they assumed that a Gujarati would know. Sometimes, I was even taunted slightly about my outsider status. I found that the best way to deal with these discrepancies was just to communicate differences as I observed them and to begin a dialogue.

The linguistic issues that were initially involved in this dialogue were an unexpected challenge of my fieldwork. I was raised in a family that spoke Gujarati at home; therefore, I had always been complimented on my ability to speak Gujarati by members of the diasporic Gujarati community and family members in India. I had a very basic reading knowledge and could identify and read simple sentences. Therefore, during my language study of Gujarati for my degree, I worked to increase my vocabulary, beyond being able to communicate in a social setting, to more complex topics involving music, literature, and especially social and cultural references. I also worked on my ability to translate between Gujarati and English (and vice versa).





However, when I entered the field in 2009, I was met with a very complex mixture of language that was somewhat baffling. Different dialects of Gujarati, mixed with Hindi and remnants of a British-styled English with its own distinct Indian identity, quickly became part of my conversations with informants. I coped by acquiring greater language skills as quickly as possible – I took Hindi classes to become more familiar with the mechanics of the language, read as much as I could about Gujarati music to further increase my vocabulary, and kept track of all of the words that I encountered and did not understand to discuss their definitions with my language teachers. These four months of immersion-style study resulted in a conversation style that allowed me to engage in complex and critical conversations with my Gujarati informants that were free of language barriers.

All of my interviews were conducted in Gujarati. While most of my informants had some degree of fluency in English, I found that I gleaned the most meaning from their words when they spoke to me in Gujarati. While definitions of English words sometimes became lost due to cultural context, our conversations retained the depth and meaning that I was seeking when I discussed Gujarati music issues with my informants. While I have included some words and phrases, transliterated from Gujarati to English, in my dissertation, I found that to retain the integrity of what my informants shared with me, it was easiest to translate our conversations directly from Gujarati to English.

As I was completing my research, I had an assistant in the field with me, who helped a great deal with a lot of the cultural barriers that I experienced. She



originally began working with me by helping me collect sources and aiding with travel logistics. Often, individuals felt more comfortable with her initially, immediately sensing her to be a “complete insider,” and she would serve as my cultural conduit. Whether it was differences in language, food, or customs, none of the apprehensions of my informants ever became a barrier in our communication; however, I had to keep in mind that I had been prepared for the differences between them and me through years of coursework and preparation for fieldwork. My research assistant also assisted in diffusing any awkwardness that might ensue from my being a single female who was meeting individuals that I did not know for the first time. Being older than I was, she took on a somewhat maternal role to lead into social situations, which I quickly carried into research conversations.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was told by initial informants that an important part of my research would be spending a long enough period of time in Gujarat and observing different life situations, such as weddings, funerals, and other life events. It was presumed that, after this initial period of observation, I would have enough context to ask questions that would help me find the answers that I was looking for. I was also warned that food would become a prevalent part of my interactions. It was not until I listened to this conversation again at the end of my fieldwork that I realized that my initial informants were trying to explain to me that developing relationships with my informants would be crucial to having the kinds of conversations that would aid my research goals.





In the development of these relationships, one of the things that I became most acutely aware of was my status as NRI (Non-Resident Indian) Gujarati woman. Interactions between individuals in public and private spaces in Gujarat fall across gendered lines. In a social situation, I found that men and women often sit on opposite sides of a room. They do not stop interacting with their opposite gender counterpart; however, they remain in the domain of their own gender during this interaction. Hence, I was always placed with females when I interacted with people. In the most conservative settings, I found that bringing another female with me, preferably someone older who would understand the social code would allow me to traverse into the male realm, especially if I maintained my position as a researcher.

At first, I found this social construction to be limiting. I could not understand why men and women could not communicate on an “equal” plane, but I came to realize that both men and women found their social authority and identity placement based on the roles that each one played. I also found that individuals found comfort in knowing that they had a role, and therefore a specific function, in each social situation. They often asked me what these kinds of gender relationships and social interactions would be like in America, and when I would reply that there was a lot more opportunity to define one’s self based on individual preference, they found the idea of constant identity negotiation and construction to be a rather daunting undertaking. Having a natural interest in this “daunting undertaking,” based on the different realms of gender expectations that I was raised in as a diasporic Gujarati “girl” and as a young American “woman,”



my conversations attempted to uncover the stories of women as much as I could through the conversations that I had about history with my informants. By presenting such an inter-subjective position to my informants, I found that I received an equally complex position in return, which resulted in meetings and interviews that were multi-layered and that did not provide a concise point of analysis.

For example, most of my initial meetings with informants were centered around a heavy meal because I was meeting them for the first time. While I appreciated the hospitality, it was often difficult to continue conversations, because the process of being served and eating a multi-course meal was rather time consuming, especially in more traditional settings where women serve men and guests food before eating themselves (and where I often encountered regional fruits and vegetables, as well as cooking styles that are not commonly utilized by diasporic Gujaratis). However, I quickly learned that a benefit to encouraging conversation while eating, if my hosts were willing to engage, was that men and women would be in the same social space, since women served the food as men ate. By having these conversations, I could get feedback from both about music and even create some gender dialogue.

### ***Literature Review on Gujarat***

In the existing studies of Gujarat, literature on humanities topics has been somewhat scant and difficult to come by. A fair amount of scholarship exists on



the early history of Gujarat (Chavda 1972, Gopal 1975, Sheikh 2010), as well as fairly recent communal violence in Gujarat, particularly in the early 2000s (Anand 2011, Powers 2009, Shani 2007, Spodek 2011). Urban growth patterns have also been studied by some scholars; however, these studies focus largely on industry and economy (Swaminathan 2008). Some general studies exist on Gujarati history and politics (Dharaiya 1970, Sheth 1976). In addition, small communities within Gujarat have been studied (Glatter 1969, Kapur 2008, Misra). The issue that I found with the latter two types of sources is that “generalized” books on history and politics tend to be rather broad, especially when attempting to study evolution people and places; meanwhile the case-based studies on smaller communities do not provide enough contexts to place these studies into a broader discourse on Gujarat. Therefore, in my own work, I have attempted to bridge these two scholarly vantage points with contextual information as well as oral histories from individuals to provide a somewhat anthropological approach to the urban middle class, which is an ostensibly sociological domain.

Since I am most interested in Gujarati music in urban areas, its meaning in society and its place as a cultural practice is particularly important to me as I begin to examine it. My preliminary ethnographic work revealed a disjuncture in how individuals perceive music in urban areas, based on how the music is created, where and how it is listened to, and the purpose that the music serves. Therefore, I began my review of existing literature on Gujarat by understanding aspects of Gujarati society where this disjuncture occurs. These have been identified by T.K. Oommen as “patriarchy, inequality, sectorality, peripherality, externality and





hierarchy” (2005, 19). In his chapter on the issues that Gujarat has faced, he insists, among ten points made to solve Gujarat’s problems, that cultural pluralism should be recognized as a “value orientation.” While advocating cultural pluralism, Oommen warns against cultural relativism, which he believes “endorses all kinds of inhuman practices in the name of cultural purity” (Oommen 2005, 126).

These statements are particularly poignant in light of Gujarat’s complex background. Ravi Kalia states that it is called the “melting pot of India.” The modern-day name of Gujarat is derived from Gujjara-ratta or Gurjjara-rastra which translates to “country of the Gurjarras.” According to Kalia, the Gurjarras were a Central Asian tribe that is believed to have entered India during the mid-fifth century during the decline of the Guptas. There was Muslim rule over Gujarat during the Mughal period. Maratha raids during the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century caused a division that made Gujarati integration into the Bombay Presidency near-impossible.

The effect of religion on Gujarati society was also seen in India at a broader level; furthermore, a “secular” nationalist voice was also present. I use Jawaharlal Nehru’s autobiographical chapter on religion to understand the position of this voice. In response to Gandhi’s fasts in September 1932, Nehru stated, “I felt angry with him at his religious and sentimental approach to a political question, and his frequent references to God in connection with it” (Nehru 1989, 370). It is significant to note that Gandhi used his personal religious beliefs to react to aspects of the British Government, as well as Nehru’s concern



of Gandhi setting a precedent whereby individuals would use religious beliefs to react to political issues. A dialogue on the place of religion in politics continues; in a country where many political parties are based on social and religion movements, the resignification of musics, which were originally used for religious purposes, for political reasons has resulted in strong modernized meanings for “traditional” musics.

Before I delve into specific situations in which the interplay between points of disjuncture in Gujarati society and cultural history coincides, I wish to look to Robert Eric Frykenberg’s work on historical understanding as way of understanding the different narrative accounts of Gujarati society. From my understanding of Gujarati history, a Gujarati sense of regionalism emerged in Gujarati people’s relationship to the different groups that they encountered, particularly in port cities such as Surat. To affirm a sense of Gujarati identity, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Gujaratis established institutions through which they could respond to the forces against which the region and its people were attempting to define itself. Meanwhile, individuals such as Narmad and Gandhi have been valorized to represent a Gujarati ideal. Negotiating between the institutions and individuals that are represented in Gujarati society, I find Frykenberg’s words to be particularly helpful; “individual identities can become institutionalized and ... qualities of human individuality, if not personality, can be ascribed or attributed to institutions. Nowhere is this dialectical interplay of identity between individuality and institutionality more evident than in the functioning of stories within history” (Frykenberg 1996, 67).





An institution that is particularly important when examining women and their relationship to cultural aspects of society is Akhil Hind Mahila Parishad, a national organization that participated in issues of women's suffrage and in the consideration that women's roles within the home should change as a result of education (Shah 1984, 48 – 50). According to Shah, the values of regional branches, particularly the one in Surat which she analyzes, have changed with time, as reflected by the rewordings of constitutions which reflect their views on the status of women and their problems within society (Shah, 59 – 75). While Shah appreciates the early goals of the voluntary organization, which arose from the social reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, she believes that its social value was diminished by the Parishad's pursuing social and cultural activities. As a result of Akhil Hind Mahila Parishad's high level of activity in Surat, as well as my own family's involvement in the organization, I am interested in understanding how the organization's activities evolved as a result of national and regional interests, as well as political constraints.

*Regional Roots of Indian Nationalism*, edited by Makrand Metha, contains a section on the role of women in peasant movement in Gujarat by Shirin Mehta. It highlights the significance of social reform that had preceded Gandhi's work, without which Mehta argues that Gandhi's work would not have been as effective as it was. Mehta also explains that Kasturba, Gandhi's wife, encouraged women to be like Sita,<sup>2</sup> who exemplified the ideal housewife and supporter of her male

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<sup>2</sup> Sita is the female consort of the Hindu god, Rama, who is held in esteem as the ideal model of a wife and woman for all Hindu women.



partner. Kasturba also advocated the importance of women to organize and live as the better halves of their husbands in order to promote satyagraha<sup>3</sup> (Mehta 1990, 70). *Bhajan mandalis* (“institutions of singing devotional songs”) were significant for having brought together urban, upper class women and lower class, peasant women for the purpose of working together, even though this mobilization eventually proved to be unsuccessful, according to Mehta, because of a lack of “horizontal mobilization” between castes.

The issue with examining social organizations, and the institutions that emerged from them, as a singular identity is that either these organizations were comprised of individuals from one social class or they had to negotiate the needs of individuals from different classes, who then provided a diverse range of individual opinions through which the organizations became institutionalized. *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in Gujarat*, written by R. L. Raval, examines the connection between Surat and Bombay during the reform movements, particularly through the voices and opinions of Karsandas Mulji and Poet Narmad. The book also examines the emergence of institutions, as well as the issues surrounding reform in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (particularly resulting from the “fashion” of being called a reformer in higher social circles). It also studies approaches to cultural synthesis; however, the focus of the book tends to be on very specific movements. Similar to Raval, Ghanshyam Shah’s book on *Protest Movements in Two Indian States* highlights the issues of

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<sup>3</sup> This term translates to “insistence on the truth.” This term was developed by Gandhi as a philosophy and practice that was a part of the nonviolent resistance during the Indian independence movement.



different social groups, particularly businessmen, rich peasants, urban labourers, agricultural labourers, middle class, teachers, and students. He looks at the period of political unrest in 1974; therefore, the book serves as a way to study the effect of unresolved social issues from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward.

*Social Change in Gujarat*, by Neera Desai, focuses on historical changes pertaining to how politics and religion affected economics, education, and mass communication during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The book explains how educational systems, particularly in pre-19<sup>th</sup> century Gujarat, were determined by individuals or groups, since the State did not have responsibility over the matter (1978, 39). Desai implies that as a result of economic changes, particularly in manufacturing during British rule, the “large-scale” societies that emerged had more complex educational needs (249). As a result, a “literary renaissance” that focused on social and religious reform was particularly significant in Gujarat during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (251).

However, I believe that to examine the education movement too closely, particularly prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, results in too strong of a focus on the urban elite. Therefore, I look to David Hardiman’s work on the *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*. The book is a historical examination of the peasant movement, particularly focusing on Kheda. Since the significance of peasant-based reform has been a recurring topic, I question how these movements, and particularly the mobilization of these individuals, has affected the overall Gujarati landscape (particularly in the push towards urbanization). According to Hardiman, the two questions that permeate scholarship based on peasant movements is “the manner





in which peasant support for the nationalist movement was mobilized” and “the class nature of peasant nationalism” (1981, 243). The effect of religion in mobilization, as well as the effect of caste and community on the support of these movements is debated at the conclusion of Hardiman’s book.

Finally, *Modern Gujarat* by Vijay Singh Chavda provides a general historiographic work that focuses on historical writings themselves. These books provide a great deal of context for social, political, and religious issues that affect the music that I am examining. They also emphasize the stratification of Gujarati society, despite the strong regionalist sentiments that have resonated since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Locating My Study of the Middle Class***

The middle class in India and their musical practices have been studied by scholars who have examined historical significance, considered the meaning of emerging styles, and the effect of the narrative in music. Here I would like to present a short review of the works of several scholars, which describe the situation that I encountered when examining the urban middle class that I examined in Gujarat. These authors depart from the trends in ethnomusicology that have long studied the music makers of hereditary lineages, folk traditions, or fairly broad trends in mediated musics; while these works present excellent contextual information in South Asian music, they do not provide a point from which one may delve into regional studies. Although none of the scholars



examine Gujarat specifically, each considers issues that establish a basis for the questions that I asked during my own fieldwork.

Janaki Bakhle provides a historical piece of work, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (2005), that links together the modern history of Hindustani classical music in India based in western India. She begins with the princely courts, through the analysis of Baroda in Gujarat. Bakhle states that she chooses Baroda as a case for “feudalistic modernity” because it was a wealthy princely state, seen as exemplarily modernized by the British, and had a leader who was a patron of learning and the arts, particularly music. She then studies social reform and the process of music entering the public stage, which particularly focused on women as education was reformed and musical appreciation societies developed to establish a clearer social role for music among middle class individuals. The central chapters of the book focus on stories of Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, a religious conservative, and Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, a liberal secularist, who independently attempted to standardize Hindustani music practice. Bakhle studies the music conferences that encouraged conversation about music in its newfound public space, where it becomes apparent that Paluskar’s religiously-based institutions were far more successful than Bhatkhande’s attempts at institutionalizing Hindustani music practice. The book ends with the story of *gharana* (a “house” or “family” of musicians who share musical ideology and practices that are passed from teacher to student) musicians who modernized with their musical audiences.



The pivotal points of the book are the two chapters that discuss Paluskar and Bhatkhande's motivations towards establishing a Hindustani music pedagogy. The ethno-historical work of Bakhle, who sometimes tends to lean toward a secularist perspective of history, explores the diverse social and political settings and motivations, through which a "national culture" had to be founded. She notes that the work of both men failed to successfully deal with minorities within society or gender issues, although she herself does not particularly analyze the regional contexts that would identify the specific needs of either minorities or specific gender situations.

Bakhle's work establishes the complex interconnectedness of a middle class voice that emerged during the social reforms that led to independence; however, the significance of that voice remains to be analyzed, especially as it applied to emerging regional settings, such as in Gujarat. Music served as a tool for the middle class to delineate parameters of agency.<sup>4</sup> As a result of influence from British orientalism, art music served as a model for the educated middle class to situate their own practices on. However, this art music itself became a signifier of agency for middle class individuals, examples of this signification are shown through the work of Bakhle, Weidman, the development of film music, and the effect of classical music on middle class educations and folk traditions.

After a brief overview of modern *Karnatic* (South Indian classical music) music history and the entry of the violin into South India, Weidman begins an analysis of the place of the instrument in South India in the chapter of the book

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<sup>4</sup> The principles of agency that I mention here are derived from practice theory (Ortner 1984).





that is entitled “Gone Native?: Travels of the Violin in South India” (2006). She identifies how the violin gained merit for its ability to mimic the singing voice. Violin technique was reformed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the violin came to be associated with modernity for its “Westernness and newness” and “its ability to imitate the Karnatic voice.” Weidman traces the changes in performance styles, and she identifies the new style that emerged during the 1990s to “suggest that something in the notion of the voice” had changed.

Weidman believes that because of the “magic” of the violin “each experiment re-enacts and fulfills Karnatic music’s stubborn insistence that it can be considered on a par with Western classical music. If such a claim is the basis of the politics of classical music in South India, the violin is what makes it audible” (Weidman 2006, 55). Later, she continues “by the logic of ventriloquism, the site of deepest colonial impact is transformed into the very sign, and sound, of a pure Indian voice (Weidman 2006, 56).

How this voice is then used by the middle class is an important question. Stokes states that “music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them” (1997, 5). The process through which these identities are then enacted is where regional issues come into play. Schultz begins her article, entitled “The Collision of Genres and the Collusion of Participants: Marathi *Rastriya Kirtan* and the Communication of Hindu Nationalism” (2008), with a compelling description of a *rastriya kirtan*, a Hindu performance genre “that combines nationalist storytelling, songs of multiple genres, and religious



discourse.” The story told depicts a Hindu soldier in battle with a Muslim king, in which the Hindu soldier is victorious. This performance was given during a time of serious political tension in Maharashtra. As a goal of her paper, Schultz explains that, “By exploring how nationalist ideas are expressed in a regional narrative, musical, and ritual idiom, I hope to reach some understanding of how people become devoted to the nation and motivated to engage in physical and discursive violence against members of other social groups.”

Though the analysis of *rastriya kirtan* situations, *bhajans*, and the abilities of performers, Schultz uncovers a situation in which a religious space can be transformed to an area where Hindu nationalist chant is sung and political criticism is delivered. This kind of analysis becomes particularly poignant in the kinds of social situations described by Arjun Appadurai in his discussion of global *ethnoscapes*. For Appadurai, *ethnoscape* refers to issues of perspective and representation, as well as the complexities of dealing with nonlocalized definitions of *ethno* as populations as groups move to different locations and “reconstruct their histories.” As a result, Appadurai believes that “there is an urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of what is not called deterritorialization.” Appadurai suggests the interpretation of “local historical trajectories” to analyze “transnational structures” should occur through *ethnoscapes* to study the “alternative, interactive modernities” of today’s world. This kind of interpretation is very appropriate when examining urban areas in Gujarat.



My informants presented me with a fieldwork experience full of human agents exercising their agency within various structures that I began to question as I completed my dissertation. I began to follow some of these streams, perplexed by what had developed between my semiotic approach to Gujarati music, the development of this music, my discussion of gender, and my concluding thoughts on the importance of place for Gujarati music. Cultural agency, in the case of my ethnographic data – musical-cultural agency, which I stated to be a “strategic tool that is constantly being negotiated as political, social, and economic changes have transformed the landscape of Gujarat.” is the primary stream that I wish to expand upon here.

In my discussions of agency, the human agents have not always been clear, neither have been the structures in which these human agents have exercised their agency. As a possible way of overcoming what he calls “the essentialism of the agency/structure duality,” Stephan Fuchs recommends constructivist observations whereby the issue of agency and structure become an empirical puzzle where one situation affects another through first and second-level variations.

The question that I pose is how to determine who and what is being affected and how, especially when the locations of the human actors cannot be clarified. For example, when one is discussing cultural capital, one uses the parameters of cultural capital to locate an individual within a value system, whereby certain characteristics such as a university degree, certain skills, and cultural preferences determine a “social location.” Cultural capital can be used to





denote a social location when a hierarchy of values has been established to some degree.

In the case of Gujarat, the notion of national versus regional values are still being negotiated, especially in the post-1991 era when India turned to a largely capitalist system and as new states are being formed. I use the notion of cultural agency to denote situations where individuals use culture to negotiate agency in social, political, and economic spheres. During the process leading to Indian nationalism and to the development of Gujarati statehood, it was especially important to bring diverse groups, spread among caste and class lines, together for the sake of a new nation and the formation of new states. How this would be done has been contested since the time of Indian Independence. Within Gujarat, the localized effect of Gandhi's work has encouraged regional development.

In the post-1991 era, with a broad range of media being available to middle class households and a greater access to capital and opportunity being available to individuals, the significance of maintaining a regional voice has been debated. Here, the musical-cultural agency afforded by a regional voice is what becomes noteworthy to examine, especially in the case of different settings such as the music of Pragna Vashi, whose work is described towards the end of Chapter 4. A regional voice allows her to disseminate dialogue on topics for women that would otherwise be difficult to gain a broad voice for. Hence, by using a regional music, Gujarati *sugam sangeet* (essentially translates to music that is likeable also known as light classical music), which utilizes classical music and folk music, Vashi reaches her target audience quickly and efficiently in order



to discuss social and political matters. While classical and folk music have been well identified as indices and icons for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is important to note how individual agents determine agency through the musical range that they practice and consume. Therefore my study of an emerging regional music has led me to locate human agency in the unique voices of particular individuals featured in my text as ethnographic information, each of which exemplifies a salient aspect of, or particular contribution to, the project of studying Gujarati musical and cultural identity.

### ***The Ethnographic Domain***

Gujarat is “the most urbanized state” in India (Yagnik and Sheth 2005, 234). Yagnik and Sheth explain that “city-dwelling Gujaratis continue to have strong social and economic links with their village of origin” (2005, 234 – 5), which is why there is not the same rural versus urban antagonism that exists in other states in India. Those who make surpluses invest it in their villages, and it is also “invested in caste-based institutions and places of worship in the village” (2005, 235), which eventually turn into small towns. The first wave of urbanization in Gujarat occurred during the late nineteenth century, which Yagnik and Sheth attribute to the textile industry, railways, and the Chhapaniyo famine. Land reforms during the 1950s triggered a second wave of migration, and a third wave of migration was caused by a drought that occurred from 1984 to 1988; Yagnik and Sheth state that one out of three Gujaratis lived in a city by 1991.



This is a notable fact, considering that the deregulation and economic liberalization that occurred in 1991 had a tremendous impact on the business-savvy Gujarat. As one of the wealthiest states in India, Gujarat consumes a large amount of media through television, radio, internet, and phone. Privately owned stations have provided a large amount of commercial media; however, based on my observations, television and radio provided a means for the demographic of adults of the age of forty and over to receive their media. Younger people tend to exchange music and information via internet and mobile telephone. The telephone particularly is a ubiquitous method of transmitting data, particularly through Bluetooth connections.

The ongoing relationship between urban and rural centers in Gujarat provides a way for folk songs and *bhakti sangeet* (religious devotional music) to be transferred from rural areas to urban settings, where I believe that they are modernized to fit their new setting. It is in this unique situation, where urban and rural musics are juxtaposed, that sugam sangeet becomes particularly important as a tool through which localized traditional musics are changed for broader, urban audiences. This is not an entirely new observation, nor is it unique to Gujarat; Milton Singer examined the relationship between the “Little and Great Traditions” in Madras (Singer 1959, 171). In the case of Madras he stated, that “Little and Great” traditions are both found in rural and in urban areas, but they are in different forms. He cites popular devotional and classical forms of music as “essentially urban developments.” After having discussed folk, ritual, popular devotional, classical, and modern urban forms of music, Singer states, “These five





different kinds of performance are but points on a single continuum when we compare their media, performers, language, place and occasion of performance, and themes.” Over the past half century, these relationships have continued to evolve, and it is the “modern urban forms” that I am most interested in, which in the case of Gujarat is sugam sangeet; however, the modern forms gain their meaning based on how music makers and listeners identify with them. Most often, they have some kind of basic tie to folk, ritual, popular devotional, and classical music in the case of traditionally-based sugam sangeet. However, the genre has now evolved to represent the identity of a regional aesthetic, which also holds a significant space in the pan-(North) Indian musical setting that Gujarat is directly situated in and amongst the global music setting that Gujaratis are actively part of through media.

Carol Babiracki examines the placement of tribal music with regard to the idea of “Great and Little” traditions; however, the issue of the difference between tribal music and folk music is what arises. Hence, the dichotomy poses issues to scholars who wish to study the “little music” traditions (Babiracki 1991, 85). Here, I recommend, based on my research in Gujarat, that social function of the music and the process of music making are good ways to find spaces within tribal music and folk music for the multitude of genres that exist in urban music spaces.

During the time and in the location of Singer’s fieldwork, the following statement described the changing situation of the arts: “It would be inaccurate, however to apply the Western concepts of secular urban mass culture and of ‘art for art’s sake’ in interpreting these changes. There are, indeed, secularizing



tendencies, but they have not cut off urban culture from the traditional matrix of sacred culture” (Singer 1959, 173). I would argue that “art for art’s sake” has emerged from the social dialogue that now exists in Gujarati music, which became more broadly defined as a type of regional music during the movement for Indian independence when individuals from different castes and classes came together and were united through the music (that is now associated with that movement). The dialogue and aesthetic utilized varies widely in each of the major Gujarati cities, and is further explored in the following chapters; however, a large part of my fieldwork centers around the city of Surat.

The four largest cities in Gujarat are Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Rajkot, and Surat. I chose to complete my fieldwork in Surat, because I have been intrigued by the city ever since my childhood visits. Both of my parents are Gujarati; my mother is from Surat, and my father was raised Vadodara (though his family is originally from Dwarka). Since my earliest days in Surat, I would hear about its rich cultural history from family friends who were teachers and business people. Being a diasporic Gujarati, it was seeing Gujarati culture in the homeland that was most exciting for me, and I was always curious about the sounds that I heard. They seemingly came from rather diverse origins, yet were part of a symbiotic urban music culture, and the more questions that I asked, the more that I realized that there was not a lot written about urban, middle class music culture. Wanting to study the middle class, I knew that personal relationships would be important, especially since I wanted to study the traditions of peoples who did consider themselves to be professional music makers. So, when I began my work, I



decided to begin my initial inquiries in Surat and then explore other urban areas, yet it was Surat that kept me intrigued.

Ahmedabad has a well-documented culture history of bhakti sangeet, especially from the time of Gandhi's time in Ahmedabad onward, and of the folk traditions that exist in that area. Vadodara has a tradition of classical music that dates back to the time of Sayajirao Gaekwad.<sup>5</sup> Rajkot has had an important role as the most centralized large city in Gujarat, and it became the capital of Saurashtra<sup>6</sup> when "217 princely states of Kathiawar and Saurashtra, including the leading former kingdom of Junagadh, were merged together" into the province of Saurashtra, which was then merged with Bombay State (Pandya 2007, 21). However, Surat, a cosmopolitan city of trade, with a significant population had not been studied extensively. As the southern-most city in Gujarat, with close ties to Mumbai, I was intrigued to find that the middle class individuals here did not consider themselves to be very connected to music. There was a lack of an apparent music culture, yet I experienced an overwhelmingly saturated soundscape.

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<sup>5</sup> Sayajirao was the Maharaja of Baroda State from 1875 to 1939. He is known for having been a patron of the arts. The Academy of Indian Music that was founded through his patronage is now the Faculty of Performing Arts of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Vadodara.

<sup>6</sup> Saurashtra is a peninsula on the Arabian Sea that comprises the south western portion of Gujarat.





## *Unpacking the Ethnographic Domain: Identifiers and Identity*

One of my first conversations about music with an intelligent listener of Gujarati music, who himself is a professor of commerce, helped me to determine the different genres that I would find in the urban areas of South Gujarat. Hearing his list of genres, as well as his brief descriptions for each genre, really helped me begin to explore the approach that an urban Gujarati would have with regards to music. He first identified *lok sangeet*, which is folk music; however, he said, “Well, the important thing here is that the people came first, and then they began to sing, so we had music.” It was an interesting approach to music, which made me realize that I would need to shift my focus to the people, and not necessarily the music, that I would encounter. He identified Jhaverchand Meghani as an important figure in Gujarati folk music (whose contributions to folk music are discussed further in Chapter Two), and he also told me *garba* (folk music and dance that is traditionally performed during the nine-day festival *Navratri*, which worships Ambama, who is also known as the Goddess Durga or Kali in other parts of India) and *raas*<sup>7</sup> would fall into the category of folk music. He identified the *dhol* (drum) and *manjira* (finger cymbals) as being two of the most important instruments.

*Sastriya sangeet* (Hindustani classical music) was identified as art music, and we briefly identified Baroda as an important center of classical music. He

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<sup>7</sup> Raas is folk dances and musics that originate from Vrindavan (to depict scenes of Lord Krishna and Radha) and from western India as devotional dances to the Goddess Durga that are popular during Navratri; the dances often depict Krishna and Radha in western India as well.



noted that this kind of music developed and was sustained by patronage. Next, he identified tribal music. My informant told me that I would need to live in tribal areas in order to really study this music. He noted that Rajasthani folk and tribal music have been extensively studied, and he also said that the music of Saurashtra has also been studied, implying that the South Gujarati counterparts have not been examined as much. The music coming out of Mumbai, particularly Gujarati film was also identified. In the area of Gujarati film music, my informant highlighted the impact of Avinash Vyas on film music, though he noted that Vyas had “stolen music from a lot of different people.” When I asked for clarification, he explained that there are a lot of different sounds in the music that are not Gujarati or even Indian, like Western music sounds. My informant is a man who is in his late sixties, and it was interesting to note that he had a strong sense of a “Gujarati” sound that he identified as music that belonged to a certain place being in that place. We also identified the category of “light classical music,” which is what *sugam sangeet* is often identified as; however, this topic was not discussed. My informant seemed to feel that the most worthy area of study would be tribal music, especially since “the music is vanishing and needs to be documented.”

We identified the area of children’s songs as a type of Gujarati music; however, my informant’s wife, a retired teacher, told me that she did not think that this was really music. She considered it to be verbal play that was set to soothing sounds to make children happy. *Hallerda*, lullabies, were not put in the same category, because they are actually sung to put a child to sleep. We identified three other types of music. The first was *bhakti sangeet*, which a very



significant branch of music, according to my informant, dating back to the devotional music of Meerabai. While Meerabai was from Rajasthan, my informant explained that her poems and bhajans have been set to Gujarati very well. We also identified *haveli sangeet*, which is a specific genre of worship music that is sung for the Lord Krishna. Jain music was also determined to be in its own category. Finally, our list ended with *deshbhakti sangeet*, whose prominence was originally tied to the movement for Indian Independence.

Although the conversation that I have recounted gave the opinions of two people with limited knowledge, they were very aware of all of the different categories of music that I would encounter, and I often referred back to the list of genres that I created with their assistance as I did my fieldwork. This list, along with their descriptions, helped me identify genres and begin about each type of music with new informants. With initial conversations, I discovered that many middle class Gujaratis do not consider music to be a profession that one would aspire toward; however, Gujaratis are particularly fond of music that promotes Gujarati culture through the use of language, they are interested in the study of Hindustani classical music, and they are hyper-aware of the musical trends of Bollywood.

Here, I found a place to begin asking academic questions. As explained by John R. Campbell and Alan Rew, “identity” serves as a way to “capture both the underlying cultural fragmentation and the emotional bias of lived experience” in places where culture is “re-forming and hybridizing” after major institutional and economic changes (Campbell and Rew 1999, 26). The delineations between





national and regional culture, as well as urban and rural, are where the re-forming of culture has occurred in Surat during the twentieth century. Through the narratives of my informants, I have attempted to uncover the identity that has emerged in urban, middle class Gujarat.

After having gained preliminary information, I began my work with several informants – a well-known connoisseur of Gujarati music in Surat who is also actively involved in supporting and promoting the development of the arts in Surat, the head of a local arts school that provides classical music training and sugam sangeet classes, a local amateur singer who is involved with bhakti sangeet, and a retired school principal who has worked extensively with Gujarati garba for over thirty years. All four of my informants were women, who are not professional musicians themselves, but who are actively involved with amateur, middle class music-making.

The idea of an urban Gujarati middle class was a point of contention amongst some of the individuals and scholars that I talked to. They asked me how I chose to define the middle class, and my attempt to answer this question forced me to consider how I was delineating the population that I was defining as the middle class. All of the individuals that I encountered during my research defined themselves to be of the middle class; however, they inhabit a complex variety of different social spaces. Overall, they seem to own the property that they live in (whether it be a large family living in a modest flat or a retired couple living in a large bungalow), have a job or business that meets their basic needs, and are able to educate their children.



Gurcharan Das, in his book *India Unbound: From Independence to the Global Information Age* (2002), provides an interesting analysis of the middle class through a memoir-styled work that studies the social and economic changes in India from Indian independence to the current time period. He explains that the middle class was around five percent of the population around the time that India became an independent country. Das says that the middle class during the 1950s through 1970s grew with government jobs, government production of materials, and the green revolution, which allowed the children of farmers to enter the middle class. According to Das, “a person had arrived in the middle class when he did not have to do physical labor” (2002, 286). He explains that economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s led to a significant increase in the number of individuals in the middle class. Das states that, “many in the new middle class also embrace ethnicity and religious revival, a few even fundamentalism. It has been the main support of the Bharatiya Janata Party and has helped make it the largest political party in India. The majority, however, are too busy thinking of money and are not unduly exercised by politics of Hindu nationalism” (2000, 287). He cites cricket players and Bollywood film stars as the current role models of the middle class; however, I do believe that there is something more complex affecting individuals that are currently situated within the middle class.

According to Balmurli Natrajan, “the caste structure has increasingly articulated itself within a class structure, and the social reality today is neither caste in itself nor caste or class, but actually caste in class” (Natrajan 2005, 228). Natrajan argues that it is important to “focus on how class and capital are



experienced differently by workers in different cultural contexts” (2005, 238). I agree with Natrajan’s observations, which are supported by the observations of the ethnomusicologist Gordon Thompson, who, in his work on Gujarat and Gujarati music, identified two “value characteristics” of middle class Gujaratis despite “occupational, ethnic, and religious diversity,” which are “a desire to be and to be seen as religious” and “a desire to be and to be seen as wealthy” (Thompson 1987, 390). The long-standing caste and community based social structures strongly influence how the effects of capitalism and class have affected the socio-economic landscape in Gujarat during the past twenty years. This change has been particularly poignant in Surat, which was historically a prominent port for trade, and which has thrived in the later part of the twentieth century as a center for textile production and as a center for the manufacture of diamonds.

In addition to these notions of middle class, I think it is important to expand on one crucial aspect of the music makers and music listeners that I interacted with during my fieldwork: all of the individuals that I encountered are literate, and their literary aptitude and sophistication plays an important role in their appreciation of the lyrics of their music, particularly in the case of Gujarati sugam sangeet. Wendy Griswold discusses the idea of a “reading class,” which “includes the members of those classes or class fractions who routinely use reading for their work and their entertainment” (Griswold 2001, 4). The significance here, as Griswold also states, is that “the reading class is defined by



socio-economic indicators including, but not limited to, relationship to the means of production.”

In the urban spaces where I conducted my fieldwork, individuals, especially those with socio-economic agency, strongly associated with some kind of music. Martin Stokes explains in his edited volume, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, that music provides “the means by which the hierarchies of place are negotiated and transformed” (Stokes, 1997, 4). He believes that a “private collection of music” allows one to construct “trajectories rather than boundaries across space.” In the case of urban genres, Stokes states that association with these genres allows for individuals that have migrated to an urban space to become urbanites and members of the “middle class,” while maintaining interests they had held prior to their migration. In this case, Stokes says that the space has been transformed. The integration of diverse identities and interests in urban meeting spaces has been a part of Gujarati history for centuries. Geographically situated on the Arabian Sea, Gujarat has been an important area for trade, which has resulted in the meeting of individuals and cultures. Like Kaley Mason, I wish to explore identity through “dynamic and relational perspectives” (Mason 2006, 7 – 8). However, as one will observe through my ethnographic data (particularly the conversations that I had with my informants), the actors involved in the negotiation of cultural and society in urban Gujarat, especially through the genre of sugam sangeet, are very aware of these dynamic and relational situations. They reflexively adjust their processes based on the results of the musical and interpersonal relationships that they engage in.





From the narrators that are present during sugam sangeet concerts to the ways that Gujarati musicians utilize social media to interact with their audiences, it is the “human dynamic” (Qureshi 1994, 345 – 6) of this urban music setting that remains at the forefront of this thesis.

## ***Gujarati History and Society***

The first British contact with Gujarat was on August 24, 1608, when three ships of the East India Company arrived at the mouth of the Tapti River. At this point, “Surat was a bustling city and principal port of the Mughal Empire” (Kalia 2004, 14). In reference to the British arriving in Surat, Kalia states, “the western gateway of India, which had been sacked in turns by the Portuguese, the Muslims, and the Marathas, was about to undergo another transformation...” (2004, 14). Of Surat, Kalia states that Captain William Hawkins of the East India Company “found the port city crowded with Muslim pilgrims waiting for a passage to Mecca. Its streets filled with Indians, Arabs, Jews, Armenians, Portuguese, Dutch, and many other merchants, engaged in a trade of goods encompassing luxuries as well as necessities” (2004, 14 – 15).

Amrita Shodhan states that Gujarat was “conquered by the East India Company piecemeal between 1759 and 1818” (Shodhan 2010, 33). This began with the Fort of Surat, which was taken from the nawab in 1759, and the area governed by the British, who were situated in Bombay, grew through wars and treaties. Kalia states that “in 1800, when the nawab of Surat died without an heir,



the British annexed the port state” (2004, 16). The Bombay Presidency proclamation was declared on May 6, 1800. Kalia explains that, “Surat was now placed under the administration of the Bombay Presidency for the sake of administrative convenience, always of paramount concern to the British, in complete disregard of ethnic or linguistic considerations; it would remain with Bombay along with other territories of Gujarat as they came to be acquired gradually until May 1, 1960, when the new state was created” (2004, 16 – 17).

When India became independent in 1947, many former princely states, including those in Gujarat, were combined with area that was the Bombay Presidency to create Bombay State. The State was enlarged in 1956 to include additional Gujarat-speaking and Maharathi-speaking areas. The State became known as *Maha Dwibhashi Rajya*, which translates to The Great Bilingual State. Protests ensued from both linguistic groups, which was the movement for Mahagujarat within the area that became known as Gujarat. Bombay State was reorganized to create Gujarat and Maharashtra in 1960.

However, the social awareness and regionalized activism that Gujarat saw leading up to 1960 and that makes Gujarat an intriguing site for cultural study begins with the localized effect of the Indian Independence movement in Gujarat. During the movement for Indian Independence, Gandhians worked within their social space with the idea of *desh dharma* (duty towards one’s country). Krishanlal Mohanlal Jhaveri states, in his comprehensive series *The Gujaratis*, that the idea of *desh dharma* encouraged individuals of smaller local communities to come together, beyond their local spheres of social action and identity, to “the



wider collectivities of the public and the nation” (Jhaveri 2002, 525). This created a sense of identification with Surat and with India for individuals from local communities; however, Jhaveri explains that it brought with it an obligation to participate in the national cause to “remain morally upstanding persons.” Jhaveri further states, “The term had an almost coercive quality; it attempted to preempt the possibility not only of opposition but also of apathy and inaction. And, of course, it imparted to nationalist behavior an intensely religious significance.”

Thus, identification with a nationalist, public sphere became a way for individuals to work beyond the constraints of localized sphere. This culture of dharma was also utilized for women for whom *stridharma* (the duties of women) was a common persuasive tool used by Gandhians to encourage women to meet in public spaces during the movement for Indian Independence (Jhaveri 2002, 526). Mythological motifs were often used as a part of Gandhian rhetoric. According to Jhaveri, these myths ultimately led to the metaphors that constructed the myth of the Mahatma himself (Jhaveri 2002, 532 – 33).

While the noncooperation movement of the Gandhians rose after World War I and during the early 1920s, it did have a collapse because of “the underclass withdrawal from the movement, an elite return to constitutional politics, and the rise of communal politics and the growing feeling among Muslims of exclusion from the people and the nation” (Jhaveri 2002, 546). Meanwhile, “the intellectual elites of Gujarat, while facing the cultural challenges from the West, tried to devise the philosophy of social framework informed by





their own perception, which might resolve the cultural-identity crisis” (Jhaveri 2004, 639) through works written from the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century. Based on my research, I have observed that the ideas of these individuals, along with some of their actual written words, would eventually serve as inspiration for lyrics to Gujarati music.

An article published in the Ahmedabad edition of the *Times of India* during Navratri in 2009 features garba from the time of Indian Independence. The article, entitled *Garba Incited Gujaratis Against British: Songs For Freedom Were Hugely Popular*, states,

Though Navratri is a religious festival, it assumed a political hue during the colonial period. Many poets composed songs appealing to the Goddess to destroy the evil in the form of white rulers. Such garba were very popular during the freedom struggle and people sang it with extra pride. Many poets and publishers were booked and prosecuted for inciting people against the British (Vashi 2009).

While history from the time of Indian Independence is often featured in the media and widely discussed, constructing the history between the time of Gujarati statehood in 1960 and the present becomes more complex. In the third volume of his series *The Gujaratis*, Jhaveri briefly outlines a modern history of Gujarat between 1960 and early 1990s through its political culture, which is described in relation to national politics and internal politics, particularly those having to do with urban versus rural issues as well as those having to do with caste and class-based concerns. Determining ideologies that encompass the need of such a broad population has been a challenge during Gujarat’s social, political, and economic development in the decades following the creation of the state of



Gujarat. Jhaveri cites the social issues that have resulted in Gujarat, particularly violence against women and that “the map of Gandhi’s Gujarat is dotted with an increasing number of ‘trouble spots’ which are prone to social/communal conflict” (Jhaveri 2002, 306). Regarding the issue of religion, Peter van der Veer states, “What we find in Gandhi’s political philosophy is an interpretation of Hinduism’s hierarchical relativism. One might consider it as a hierarchical relativism which includes other religions within its ‘faith’” (van der Veer 1995, 295). Van der Veer goes on to state that “faith” is located and defined differently by other religions, which is where issues lie for the individuals in various political-religious movements and the scholars who study them.

Written accounts of Gujarati history, relating specifically to the music that I examined, were difficult to find during my fieldwork; also, the multitude of perspectives available in an urban setting actually made it somewhat challenging to decide whose trajectories of history I would follow as I attempted to historically situate the music that I encountered. Therefore, I found former teachers, as well as a Freedom Fighter who actually went to prison with Gandhi during the movement for Indian Independence, to serve as the best sources for the social history that I needed to contextualize the musical traditions that I found in the field. In the following section, I include five interviews that provided salient context for me when I was in the field and as I began to explore urban, Gujarati music.

The information that I received, and especially the insight that I gained, from talking to a combination of the two teachers, a father and son, as well as the



Freedom Fighter that I encountered, provided invaluable context for me to begin asking questions. When I first asked questions about Gujarati music, individuals would describe Hindustani classical music or different types of folk music to me; however, we would not discuss music in the same way that I was used to in a North American conversation about music. Performers, audiences, and the sound of the music itself were rarely discussed. The occasions when this kind of music was sung would be described briefly before moving on to some related topic.

When I had this group discussion, however, the teachers began talking about poems that were sung through music. This is when I learned that Gujaratis approach the significance of music through the lyrics and purpose of the song. In addition, I learned about the historical importance of *bhavai* (folk theater performances) that involved public performances based on social situations, sometimes of a satirical nature, that also might have involved music. I also learned how to refer to folk songs based on function, rather than as folk songs which was a broad enough category that I was never able to have proper conversations with any of my informants by simply bringing up the topic of “lok geet.”

### ***Contextualizing the Public Culture of Music in Gujarat: The Movement for Indian Independence***

I was fortunate to be able to discuss the history of Indian Independence with Chotubhai Patel, a Gujarati Freedom Fighter from Surat who was involved with the movement for Indian Independence. Although his story has been fairly



well-documented by local historians, I wanted to know about the status of women during this time, as well as his own experience of being imprisoned during the movement for Indian Independence. To begin our conversation, I asked him about the women that he knew who had been involved in the movement for Indian Independence, and he mentioned that he knew of women in various families, wives and sisters of men he knew, who had gone to jail. I asked how these women became involved in the movement for Indian Independence. In the case of Jyotsnaben Shukla, Patel told me that she was originally against non-violence, but she was eventually swayed toward the movement and she went to jail two or three times. He explained that one of the tactics of the movement was to declare a statement that would have an individual arrested and be taken to jail. When they went to jail, Freedom Fighters were tortured physically by being forced to stay standing, by tying their wrists, and by forcing them to lie on ice. The conditions in which these Freedom Fighters were kept while in jail were far from ideal. In some cases, they had just one vessel to take water for hygiene purposes and to collect food. They also had a small burlap piece to sleep on, and people often used their prison-issued clothing as pillows.

While in jail, the Freedom Fighters used to recite prayers, as well as sing bhajans and *rastriya geet* (patriotic songs) together; however these recitations and singings were stopped by the British. A lot of the conditions that Patel described to me, as well as presence of music during the Independence Movement, have been depicted in movies about the Independence Era. When I asked Patel about the degree of truth depicted in these movies, he said that a lot of them are quite





truthful in their depiction of the Independence Movement; however, they might add a small, but fictional, side story and some songs to make the movies less depressing.

After having been verified as having participated in the movement for Indian Independence based upon jail registries, individuals who were involved in the movement toward Indian Independence began to receive modest benefits, such as a pension and the ability to travel on the Indian Railway free of charge. An important post-Independence issue that had to be resolved in Gujarat was the loss of land experienced by farmers that had been sent to jail during the non-violent civil disobedience of the Independence movement activities in Bardoli, which were organized by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who became one of the leaders of Gujarat. It was Sardar Patel, who was the first Minister for Home Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister of India, who helped these farmers get their land back in Bardoli; he was a strong advocate of property rights and of free enterprise. In the opinion of Patel, Sardar Patel is one of the most underrepresented individuals from the movement, whose story has not been very widely told.

Patel himself became involved in Independence activities after having completed his SSC exams.<sup>8</sup> He was already married at the time that he became involved in the movement. Both him and his wife were relatively young when he went to jail for the first time with the movement.

Because of Gandhi's teachings, women were able to "come ahead" in society, especially after the events in Bardoli. Prior to Gandhi's influence,

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<sup>8</sup> SSC exams are taken in Gujarat, and many other parts of India, after ten years of schooling.



women actually never left the house and were not a part of public culture. Patel believes that women would not have gotten the opportunity to come ahead in society if the movement had not happened. I asked if women generally attended school prior to the Independence movement, and Patel replied that they did not. Women became increasingly involved after the Dandi March,<sup>9</sup> when a lot of men who had been involved in the movement became injured. Patel explained that another incident that spurred women's involvement was that the British declared that married couples that had lived in Africa, like Gandhi and his wife, had to become re-registered as a married couple in India, otherwise their marriage was not considered to be valid. This kind of arbitrary law incensed women and encouraged them to become involved in the movement for Independence.

Many women's organizations became increasingly prominent during the time of the movement for Independence, which Patel says began around 1915 in India. In the beginning, these organizations, such as Akhil Hind Mahlia Parishad, served to bring women together for the purpose of sewing or for garba. They did sing during these meetings, particularly garba.

In addition to Patel, I talked to Prabhavatiben Dixit, who is in her nineties. She was a gynecologist during her adult life, and she also earned her pilot's license when she was in her sixties. She has served as a president of Swar Sangam, which is a music society in Surat that her husband was a founder of. I

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<sup>9</sup> This is also referred to as the "Salt March," which was an important part of the movement for Indian Independence, whereby Gandhi and others involved in the movement marched from Ahmedabad, Gujarat to Dandi, Gujarat during March and April 1930 in a nonviolent protest against the British salt monopoly in India.



talked to her to add to knowledge about women and music during the time of the movement for Indian Independence.

Dixit told me that women sang *desh bhakti sangeet* during the movement for Indian Independence, which were written by poets and set to melodies that were usually Hindustani classical music compositions. During the movement, young people would also sing those songs, even though it was possible that they could be caught by the British and be put in jail. Douglas Haynes, in his work on Surat, states that “day-to-day struggles for power and justice under colonial domination were themselves the most significant engines of cultural change “ (Haynes 1991, 5). Because of Gandhi, women came out of the house and became a part of public life. Before this, very few women were involved in public life or music (outside of songs that might be sung in the home for important events); very few women would have learned Hindustani classical music.

Most women in Gujarat did not go to school before Gandhi. Women were considered to be a burden to society and to the family. Because women were not educated, they remained entirely dependent on their parents or in-laws. They never earned money. It was not unusual for women to be mistreated within their home and in their married home. Everything was given to the male child in the household, because he would remain in the household of his parents.

Gandhi was adamant that women should be educated; schools that were known as *Kasturba Kanya Shala* that were started around 1921 were the first schools for women; my own maternal grandmother, who was born in 1918, attended one of these schools. The first teachers that taught in these schools did





so for free. Akhil Hind Mahila Parishad has also encouraged the education of women. Dixit explains that the only other place where women were educated, prior to the Independence Movement, was in Baroda State; Sayajirao Gaekwad provided free education for women. According to Dixit, the Indian Government now requires that women should be educated. Dixit says that a woman that earns money can fight injustice, and they can develop their own interests in different fields.

### ***Analyzing the Significance of Gujarati Music***

As I was beginning to find the first of the recently composed music that I would encounter in Gujarat through the work of Mehul Surti, a younger composer who is in his 30s and based in Surat, I encountered an interview with AR Rahman in *Times of India*. The reporter asked Rahman, “Has getting the Oscars for *Slumdog Millionaire* changed the western world’s perception of Indian music?”

Rahman’s answer is stated as,

I don’t know. We still have a long way to go. But this award is like an indicator – it helps me take the next big step. And if I do it right, only then will modern Indian music become a factor, a force to reckon with. So many young people in India are doing good music but most of them are trying to be someone else. What I have learnt from getting this award is that to make a significant contribution you need to move into your own zone of originality. *Slumdog Millionaire* got the award on that strength – it had its own stamp. And Danny (Boyle) helped a great deal in achieving that quality (Sheikh 2009).

A negotiation between that “original voice” and contextualizing it within the sounds that are currently being heard within the Gujarat, as well as the sounds



that are coming into Gujarat, is where the identity of Gujarati music is currently being constructed. In order to analyze the music and musical practices that I saw during my fieldwork, I plan to use Turino's explanation of Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music to begin my initial inquiry. According to Turino, Peirce believes the semiotic process to have three basic elements – the sign which is “something that stands for something else to someone in some way,” the object which is the “something else” or the “entity stood for by the sign,” and the interpretant “which is the effect created by bringing the sign and the object together in the mind of a perceiver” (Turino 1999, 222).

In the case of my research, which is urban Gujarati music culture, I am interested in examining the relationship between the signs and the objects that I have uncovered in the field. According to Turino, this falls into the second trichotomy of Peirce's concepts that allows one to analyze relationships between the three components of semiosis and the sign (Turino 1999, 225). The three terms that are used for this analysis are icon, index, and symbol. Icon is a “sign that is related to its object through some type of resemblance between them” (Turino 1999, 226), which can include an image (or a “trace”), a diagram, or a metaphor. In the music that I examine, icons are used to create immediate recognition. For example, a piece of sugam sangeet, written based on a folk melody that contains the musical traces of the original folk song, utilizes the iconic nature of the folk song to translate the original meaning to a modern composition.



The second part of trichotomy is index “which refers to a sign that is related to its object through a co-occurrence in actual experience” (Turino 1999, 227). An example that Turino provides is the theme song of a television show that serves as an index for the program. For urban Gujarati music culture, the index that I will be tracing through my work is Hindustani classical music.<sup>10</sup> The establishment of Hindustani classical music pedagogy made it a signifier of elite music culture among the urban middle class, and its permeation into all aspects of Gujarati culture, whether it be the singing of a folk song or the composition *sugam sangeet*, has come to serve as an index of an individual in Gujarati music culture that has classical music training. However, a second index emerged as I studied the listening habits of Gujaratis and their perception of the music that is heard in urban Gujarat. Popular music, including Bollywood music and global popular music, emerges as a significant index for Gujarati music listeners, particularly those who consume music through modern technology.

Finally, a symbol is a “sign that is related to its object through the use of language rather than being fully dependent on iconicity or indexicality” (Turino 199, 227); hence; words essentially serve as symbols, and I take the stance of the lyrics that I encounter in Gujarati music as serving as symbols. The tools that Turino has defined allow for one to analyze Gujarati music in a way that Gujaratis themselves analyze their music. Most Gujaratis begin with the meaning of words, choose a musical possibility through which to communicate those words (by

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<sup>10</sup> Aspects of Hindustani classical music in Gujarati music have also been studied by Gordon Thompson (1995).



placing a piece of poetry to a *raga*, which is a series of five or more musical notes that create a framework for a Hindustani music composition), and finally they might create a sense of recognition or affinity through an iconic element that is present within the music. I argue that it is the juxtaposition of regional and national icons that are found in sugam sangeet, which is where the conversation about the meaning and the purpose of sugam sangeet is most powerful. In the musical samples that I have played for individuals that have listened to my presentations on sugam sangeet, it is the initial identification of musical icons, whether they be derived from folk music, Hindustani classical music, Western film music, or even Celtic music, that the issue of locating the purpose of regional music comes from. Based on these initial icons, the discussion usually shifts to the issues of language or the juxtaposition of signs that are sometimes in contrary placement to each other and even to themselves, particularly when colloquial language and more sophisticated aspects of language come together in one song.

While these tools present an excellent possibility for examining various elements of urban Gujarati music, there are some limitations to this model of inquiry. It is where these signs lie in the local and how they connect to the regional that they gain meaning as markers of identity, rather than the essentialization of an overarching statement from the simple examination of the sign itself. This is what makes sugam sangeet so important to urban Gujaratis: it brings together musics from a diverse range of caste and place-based traditions and it places them in a regional space where they can be easily identified by those





who they are native to, but it also creates a space for these musics to be re-identified as being part of a regional, pan-Gujarati music culture.

## ***Dissertation Roadmap***

After having established my ethnographic domain, its context, and my methodology for examining urban, Gujarati music, I am presenting my ethnographic data through the remaining four chapters, which culminate in a conclusion that brings together aspects of my ethnographic focus on identity to draw conclusions. In the second chapter, I examine sugam sangeet, a genre that is an urban construct and that reflects the development of regional identity in Gujarat from the time of Indian Independence to the present. My conversations in this chapter focus on professional musicians, whose focus is the promotion of Gujarati music.

In the third chapter, I turn my focus to how music, and specifically regional music, plays a role in middle class, urban life in Surat. I begin by exploring the population of Surat as an audience through their consumption of music and culture, particularly through radio. I also outline social issues that are being negotiated through music. I then examine the enactment of Gujarati identity through the most quintessential and popular music of Gujarat: garba. After deconstructing garba, I turn my attention to the development and emergence of new Gujarati musicians.



The fourth chapter of my dissertation examines the individual agency of women and how this is manifested through music in Gujarat. While I examine gender from a relational perspective throughout my dissertation, I also consider how women have constructed a public identity through music. I begin with a cross-generational ethnographic case study. I then study women's music in the present through bhakti sangeet, *ghazal* (a poetic form consisting of couplets), and popular music.

My concluding chapter focuses on the individuals involved in Gujarati music, through various roles, as the mediators of the Gujarati identity that is being communicated through urban music culture. I examine two performance situations, as well as a performance phenomenon that is quite unique: the role of a poet narrator during a sugam sangeet concert. I end the chapter with an examination of myself as a mediator of Gujarati culture, as examined through the lens of society that I studied.



## Chapter Two – The Development of Sugam Sangeet

When I began my study of urban Gujarati music culture, my first informant was a well-known connoisseur and promoter of the arts in city of Surat, which is located in southern Gujarat. She was highly recommended to me as someone with a vast collection of Gujarati music that she had a lot of knowledge of. We spent a large part of our first day together listening to music, discussing the backgrounds of various singers, analyzing compositions for the kind of instrumentation that they utilized, and deconstructing lyrics. She helped me discover the complexity of a genre called “sugam sangeet,” which essentially translates to music that is likeable and that is also known as light classical music.

While I had been somewhat familiar with the genre prior to my listening to it with my informant, I had not been aware of the evolution of the genre or its meaning to its listeners. Through the guidance of my informant that day, I learned how to listen to sugam sangeet as a middle class, urban Gujarati person. This was not a passive consumption of music. When I asked her how she thought I should approach my studies of urban Gujarati music, and she said, “Everything is politicized, depending on the intention with which it is produced. For example, Ravi Shankar producing a piece in memory of Gandhi is politicized music.” This statement epitomizes my experience of fieldwork in the urban centers of Gujarat, which were full of articulate individuals who reminded me that cultural agency is a strategic tool that is constantly being negotiated as political, social, and economic changes have transformed the landscape of urban Gujarat.





In this chapter, I wish to explore how cultural agency has been negotiated by using sugam sangeet as a strategic tool to promote Gujarati regionalism and a distinct regional identity. I will begin with the earliest examples of social reforms in music making, examine the role of literature and folklore in creating poetry that influenced socially relevant music, and finally tracing the development of sugam sangeet as a genre by examining the relationship between the music-makers, audiences, and aesthetics involved in the genre of sugam sangeet.

Although this genre is not as pervasive to Gujarati music listeners as Bollywood might be, the critical conversations and readings that are part of this chapter unfold the issues of regionalism that this genre has dealt with, which exemplify the modernization of Gujarati music. Questions about the function of the music, and even the language itself, as well as the processes that the music has undertaken to negotiate between the icons of Gujarati folk tradition, the index of connoisseurship that has been taught to the middle class by its classical music knowledge, and the symbols that the lyrics do, or do not, provide create a fascinating musical history.

### ***Uncovering the History of Sugam Sangeet***

A lot of the historical information that I gained on sugam sangeet was through Ashit and Hema Desai, two very well-known sugam sangeet singers who I met through Menaka Thakkar, a renowned Bharatanatyam dancer and teacher who resides in Toronto, Canada but who often collaborates with the Desais to



make new music for her dance productions. The Desais are located in Mumbai, where they live with their son, Alap, a successful musician, his wife, and his first child who was born in 2010. When I told them that I wanted to do the work that I am doing on Gujarati music so more people can become aware of it, Ashit said that one of the biggest problems with Gujarati music is that the language is not understood by non-Gujaratis. The linguistic issue is especially pertinent as one uncovers the meaning and function of Gujarati music during the past two centuries.

Uncovering the history of Gujarati *sugam sangeet* has been challenging. Gujarati music culture has not been extensively studied by Western music scholars. While scholars such as Gordon Thompson have uncovered the rich terrain of Gujarati music scholarship, it is an expansive terrain that still has much left to be examined.<sup>11</sup> Within scholarship on the arts, scholarship exists on the prolific literary history of Gujarat (Maniar 1969), on very early art forms such as *bhavai* (Desai 1972), and basic folk music studies.

While information on Gujarati *sugam sangeet* is fairly well known to those who listen to this music, formal databases of knowledge do not exist. To some degree, Gujarati *sugam sangeet* is not seen as a type of music worthy of formal study; it was recommended to me by various individuals that I should pursue the study of Hindustani classical or folk music, which also included *bhakti sangeet* instead. However, I found that I was encouraged to study *sugam sangeet* by those

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<sup>11</sup> Thompson's work has explored caste identity amongst hereditary musicians in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat (Thompson 1991, 1993), which is the central Gujarati area that is west of the cities where my fieldwork takes place.



who were interested in literature, education, and the promotion of the Gujarati language. They made a compelling case for a genre that utilized the Gujarati language, that is actively being produced and consumed in a regional setting, and that engages with the Gujarati language in a modern way. I was initially intrigued by the possibility of studying modernity and creative processes of *sugam sangeet*, as opposed to the tradition and retention of Hindustani classical music and of folk musics. Eventually, I came to realize that my place as a researcher in an urban setting would allow me to see the juxtaposition of these different genres come together and understand how the symbiosis of tradition and modernity is actually a salient aspect of *sugam sangeet*.

I have culled a significant amount of information from books that were published by music scholars in Gujarat (who are also journalists and radio announcers), from knowledgeable connoisseurs of Gujarati music culture (“amateur” music-makers and listeners who had an extensive knowledge to their music), and especially from those involved in Gujarati music-making. The ethnographic information that I collected from these sources came together to form a fairly comprehensive body of data from which I have been able to examine urban, Gujarati music culture.

While pulling together this information from its many sources was rather challenging at first, the process of engaging with my sources revealed to me a mesmerizing “community of affinity” (Shelemay 2011, 374). Shelemay explains that, “...affinity communities derive their strength from the presence and proximity of a sizeable group and for the sense of belonging and prestige that this



affiliation offers. The acquisition of cultural capital inevitably plays a role in the emergence and maintenance of communities of affinity...” (374). In the case of Gujaratis, the initial sense of strength was to find a place for Gujaratis in colonial India and in a new nation during a quest for statehood. However, the determination of cultural capital has been sugam sangeet’s greatest quest. In a current Indian setting where “cosmopolitanism” is considered to be an asset and the regional and the local do not necessarily provide wealth or prestige, the maintenance of a Gujarati music that makes a case for belonging to the community is the biggest challenge. Meanwhile, urban, middle class Gujarati value systems have particularly defined expectations of musicianhood.

In the sugam sangeet community, almost all of the most well-known producers of music consider themselves to be “professional” but not “commercial” musicians. Many sugam sangeet musicians have occupations outside of music, or they have rather comprehensive music careers that focus on the dissemination of music and culture (and not necessarily the success of the musician as an individual). This kind of career includes performing concerts at large and small venues, teaching sugam sangeet lessons to music students, and creating material for mass media. Currently, the producers of Gujarati sugam sangeet delineate themselves according to three categories: lyricists, composers, and performing artists. This is rather different from popularized music forms in the West, where musicians often write and compose their own songs (or are at least fairly active in the production of these two aspects of creating the song).





## *The Early Development of Sugam Sangeet*

According to Ashit Desai, prior to 200 years ago, most of the music in Gujarat was bhakti sangeet. However, even bhakti sangeet has a complex history. Kavi (Poet) Akho (1591 – 1656) began composing songs that were satirical in nature and that encouraged social reform. One of the mediums through which he sang his songs was the manbhatt.<sup>12</sup> In the evenings, people would gather to hear his songs and learn ideas about social reforms. This tradition continued and was particularly prominent in Gujarati literature.

Although Surat is a business center of Gujarat, it has also served as a cultural hub through the prolific writers that have called Surat their home. For most Surtis, the literary and cultural tradition can be traced back to the work of Kavi Narmad who lived from 1833 – 1886 and whose disciples have established Surat as a literary centre of Gujarat. Ravi Kalia states that “arguably, the credit for first articulating the idea of Gujarati identity (*asmita*) is assigned to Narmadshankar Lalshankar Dave” (Kalia 2004, 21). The literary tradition of Narmad included poetry and public speaking, alongside scholarship; through Narmad’s work, Gujaratis gained a sense of regional and national pride. Narmad’s prolific poem “Jai Jai Garavi Gujarat” highlights cultural symbols, including non-Hindu symbols that constitute the Gujarat identity, implying that Gujarat belongs to the many castes, communities, races, religions, and sects that

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<sup>12</sup> Manbhatt are Brahmin priests, skilled in story-telling, who accompany themselves with the rhythmic beating of meter on copper pots.



inhabit the state. Mahatma Gandhi publicly acknowledged having been inspired by Narmad's philosophy of non-violence. I saw the lasting endurance of Narmad's work permeating Surat; Narmad was the namesake of the local library, and his photograph is prominently displayed in the lobby of Akashvani Radio in Surat.

While Surtis consider Narmad to have been from Surat, Narmad completed his "higher education" in Mumbai, according to R. L. Raval in his book *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in Gujarat during the Nineteenth Century*. Narmad's father encouraged him to participate in reform activities, and Raval states, "Narmad's mental make-up was shaped in a period when Bombay's social, intellectual and industrial contours were fast changing" (Raval 1987, 79). Raval compares Narmad to a "barometer" of "current modern trends." Narmad was one of the first proponents of public assembly in Gujarat, particularly Surat. His first public essay was entitled, "Advantages of Forming an Association." In this talk, Raval states, "Narmad made his audience aware of the importance of new secular associations and assemblies, which could be used for discussions and deliberations to decide the destiny of a nation" (Raval 1987, 80). The significant issue to note here is while its audience may have been largely upper class Hindus in 1851, these individuals were not a homogenous groups. Differences in social standing and religious practices affected individuals quite deeply at this point.

During the time of Gandhi, the medium of social reform-based songs became popularized during the movement of Indian independence. During this time, a lot of Bengali songs were translated into Gujarati and sung in Gujarat.



According to Ashit Desai, community-based and intellectually-based development came relatively late to Gujarat, which is why Bengali songs were translated and sung in Gujarat. Many of the individuals that I talked to about the history of Gujarati music agreed that there is a significant difference between musical development in Maharashtra and Gujarat during this time; while Maharashtra was a more literate society, that also had a more progressive public culture, reforms to Gujarati culture were made alongside the movement for independence. Therefore, through individuals coming together for the sake of reform, bhakti sangeet especially became a part of public culture. During this period, however, Gujarati poets did compose ghazals in Gujarati; however, most ghazals were not performed according to music. When I talked to Ravindra Parekh, a well-known expert on the genre of ghazal in Surat, he said that the “Mecca” of Gujarati ghazal is Rander, which is also an area in Surat with a high Muslim population.

Approximately seventy to eighty years ago, live music came to the stage through “juni rangboomi” (old dramas). These were mostly historically based, socially-oriented plays, which utilized mostly classical music as well as instrumentation. Female parts were played by men during this point. Tushar Shukla, a prominent radio announcer and Gujarati music scholar, writes in the book *Vismisadi nu Gujarat (20<sup>th</sup> Century Gujarat)* that music was an important part of the independence movement because the British would not allow individuals to meet socially during the movement for Indian independence. So,



they would meet for the purpose of a play – and then, independence propaganda would be promoted during that time.

Sugam sangeet gained a following amongst a diverse group of Gujarati individuals in its early stages. The music that was sung during the Independence Movement in Gujarat was largely composed by Pandit Khare, one of the foremost disciples of Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. Another significant figure is Jhaverchand Meghani, a renowned Gujarati folklorist to who Mahatma Gandhi spontaneously gave the title of “national poet.” Through Meghani’s work, Gujarati folk tales and folk songs were collected from all over the state, particularly from rural farming areas, and published.<sup>13</sup> Ashit Desai explained to me that Meghani compiled Gujarati lok geet. Until then, individuals learned songs “kant thop kant” and “karna” (by heart). These songs originate from the “common man.” They would make up songs, based on social situations, to bhagvan (God), and general life events. These kinds of “boli” (that which have been spoken)-songs are extremely common in the “gaam” (small town). Each of these songs vary significantly from town to town; for example, from Surat to Bardoli one of these songs would be extremely different, and Meghani transliterated all of the songs so that they would be widely understandable (“bhavan varan vaad”). This music is a style of lok geet, which has been recorded, although this style of music is still being made in places like Kutch.

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<sup>13</sup> According to Mansukhlal Jhaveri, Meghani held *dayara* (“gatherings for enjoyment of folk-literature”) in major Gujarati cities and in Mumbai through which he brought the folk literature of Saurashtra to urban, upper class elites (Jhaveri 1978, 177).





As Gujarati films emerged, a semi-classical style of music emerged with it. The stories in the film were not particularly modern. It was around the time of Gujarati film that *kaviya sangeet*,<sup>14</sup> which is now known as “sugam sangeet,” emerged. The politicized social activism that was propelled by Gujarati literature found the genre of sugam sangeet. The term, “sugam sangeet,” was established by Thakur Jaydev Singh, a senior officer at All-India Radio. The genre gained prominence in Gujarat as a platform through which Gujarati regionalism was promoted during the 1950s, the decade when Gujaratis advocated for statehood, which was eventually granted in 1960. Sugam sangeet became popular amongst college radio listeners, particularly in Ahmedabad.

Lelyveld discusses the role of All-India Radio during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, which is particularly important when discussing the relationships between the scope of music in Gujarati urban centers, the development of Gujarati sugam sangeet, and the radio. According to Lelyveld in his article, “Upon the Subdominant: Administering Music on All-India Radio” (1994), the idea of the “subdominant” refers to the “subordinate elites of Indian society with their various claims to coercive power and ideological authority.” These individuals were subordinate to the colonial powers who ruled above them prior to Indian independence. The place of radio was uncertain at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The British debated the use of radio as a tool to reach peasants; meanwhile, in Delhi, the powers and dangers of the radio were debated until it

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<sup>14</sup> *Kaviya sangeet* literally translates to poetic music; though it used to be a different genre from sugam sangeet, the two terms are now interchangeable.



was ultimately decided that “entertainment” was not the realm of the government. By 1935, however, Lelyveld says that the government decided to create a monopoly over the radio to keep regional centers from becoming too powerful. Music was not given a place in the British-supervised radio broadcasts because it did not “instruct or inform.”

B.V. Keskar, who was the Minister of Information and Broadcasting from 1950 to 1962, declared that, “The British have never been known as a very musical people.” According to Lelyveld, Keskar believed that the musical heritage of India could be saved through independence and radio broadcasting. All-India Radio was seen as a way to integrate culture and as a way to raise “cultural standards.” Lelyveld states, “With regard to music, the major concern was to replace the system of princely patronage, now clearly dead, and to counterbalance the sources of commercial music, in particular in films” (Lelyveld 1994, 119).

Hindu and Muslim issues quickly rose to the surface, as did the issue of amateur versus professional musicianhood. Adjudications of artists, the selection process, and even selecting members of the adjudicating committees had to be determined in a way that would help resolve some of these issues. In addition, Lelyveld explains that film songs, which were quickly becoming popular, also were a contentious issue because many were seen as being “erotic.” The development of “light” and “classical” genres, which helped to create another form of popular music, helped to deal with the situation of film music.



How sugam sangeet developed and negotiated social issues and issues of cultural identity that emerged within urban middle populations post-Independence are of primary focus in this chapter. This music has developed to bring together different musical and stylistic genres, as well as different perspectives, to create a distinctly regionalized popular genre. The evolution of popular music in India is discussed by Peter Manuel in his article “Popular Music in India: 1901 – 1986.” In this article, Manuel defines popular music as “music which is closely allied, in evolution, marketing, and distribution, with the mass media, and which is produced and disseminated on a mass basis” (Manuel 1988, 157). While film music is identified as the major genre of popular music in India, Manuel is also interested in independently produced popular music and the dialectic relationship between these two musics competing in the diverse Indian market. Manuel notes homogenizing musical features that have developed within the pop music industry to create a sound that appeals to the diversity of India’s market. The politics of involving regional musics within Indian film is also discussed; for example, it is noted that the Gujarati government provides tax subsidies to films that showcase Gujarati culture. Conversely, Manuel points out that film music affects regional genres because film music has become a ubiquitous part of the music culture in urban centers and in live performances. The issue of how film music affects Gujarati sugam sangeet is one that many of my informants discussed at length, and the conversations that I had with them about these effects are re-told and examined in this chapter and the following chapter.



In discussing the effects of film music on Gujarati sugam sangeet, as well as the changes that sugam sangeet has undergone, notions of preservation that occurred during my conversations often dealt with preserving the relevance of the genre itself rather than an ideal in term of style or aesthetic. Gregory Booth presents a perspective on the relationship between traditional musicians and mediated music that applies to my research; however, the notion of the traditional musician should be replaced with the idea of traditional music, which I would like to define as music that has a ritualistic or functional purpose among the individuals who use this music.

Booth examines how mass mediated music can be appropriated by traditional musicians, who are performing in social events and rituals. This is presented as a contrast to the usual perception of mass mediated music, which is that of being a threat to traditional musicians and musicianhood. He examines how meanings of music might be altered as a result of the mediated music, as well as the effect of changes to repertoire and the adaptation of the musician themselves to the new music system that they are part of. Booth argues that “the relationship between traditional and popular culture is characterized by a two-way exchange of repertoires and meanings” (Booth 1993, 159). In the case of Gujarati sugam sangeet, I believe that the process of balancing the “two-way exchange” between the “traditional” music culture, specifically Gujarati folk musics and Hindustani classical music, “popular” music culture, particularly Bollywood music, is where the identities of a Gujarati regional voice emerge.





## *Modern History of Sugam Sangeet through Three Case Studies*

In this section, I use the case studies of three different Gujarati musicians – Avinash Vyas, Shyamal and Saumil Munshi, and Mehul Surti – to study how Gujarati music has evolved to promote regionalism and its current attempts to sustain an interest in regional culture. Each of these musicians represents an important part of post-Independence music history in Gujarat, which leads to present day music and music-making. I will examine how these musicians have produced innovative and strategically relevant music by mixing elements associated with traditional and indigenous styles with those of popular music, with its associations of modernity.

Whereas the earlier urban, Gujarati music listener may have used classical music as his or her index of determining the sophistication of a regional music song, the new current listener has much broader set of parameters, which includes popular music sounds that are largely dominated by Bollywood (but that also include global popular music genres), from which to assess the quality and relevance of regional music. The symbolism in sugam sangeet, largely represented by the words in the music themselves, initially created a pan-regional sense of accessibility; however, as one will see through the case studies, these very words of a language that brought a region together to establish a state are the elements of sugam sangeet that make it inaccessible for some listeners today as the use of Gujarati is diminishing in urban centers.



After independence, it was the work of Avinash Vyas that promoted a newly found musical culture to the people of Gujarat. Vyas studied Hindustani classical music with Allaiddin Khan in Mumbai, and among his first compositions was Hindi film music that was composed with Ustad Allah Rakha. According to Nandini Trivedi, a well-known journalist based in Mumbai, Vyas composed over 15,000 songs; his work was featured in approximately 175 Gujarati films, and he also wrote approximately seventy-five songs that were featured in Hindi films. When speaking of Vyas, the most commonly heard statement in Gujarat is “*Avniash Vyas e Gujaratio ne gata karya*,” which translates to “Vyas made the Gujaratis sing.” It is said that even those Gujaratis who do not consider themselves to be singers can easily sing one of Avinash Vyas’s songs. His most enduring songs are of a devotional nature; topics of worship that focus on Ambamata, who is known as Durga or Kali in other parts of India, and who is worshipped most fondly in Gujarat during Navratri when garba and raas dances are performed for nine nights. One of his most popular songs is “*Madi taru kanku khairu ne suraja ugyo*.” It describes how the red, powdery kanku from Mataji’s forehead has painted the sky and how the sun has risen from this poetic sky.

I believe that Vyas’s music utilized Hindustani classical music to appeal to urban, Gujarati elites, who had initially been exposed to Hindustani classical music through the work of Vishnu Digambar Paluskar and his students (most notably Pandit Khare, who composed much of the prominent music having to do with the Independence movement during his residence in Ahmedabad). Vyas



composed melodious music with very traditionally based lyrics on topics that were important to most Gujarati Hindus, particularly topics of worship which incorporated descriptions of nature, regionally based settings, and other imagery that would appeal to Gujaratis. However, a key aspect of Vyas's music is that the lyrics were fairly easy to understand, and the music that he composed was meaningful and even functional. Nandini Trivedi states, in her book *Geet Gurjari*, that Vyas introduced classical melodies to traditional garba folk dance (73). Prior to Vyas's classicization of this genre, garba folk dances were sung in a call and response fashion by women as they danced around the *garbo* (a clay pot that is used in worship during Navratri). His music took elements of the indigenous and modernized them for pan-Gujarati, elite, urban audience. According to Ashit Desai, garba was brought to the stage through Vyas's music; these garba are now known as *prachin garba* (which originate from lok geet).<sup>15</sup> These songs have been popularized by singers like Asha Bosle and Mukesh, as well as through their dissemination on All-India Radio.

In a conversation that I had with him, Tushar Shukla said that he finds that musicians are going to be strong proponents of the school of thought that they come from in music, and they might even discuss the negatives of those who do not make music in the same way. However, he believes that it is important to listen to all of these individuals and take what one can to amass an understanding of music scholarship.

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<sup>15</sup> A further definition of *prachin garba* is presented in Chapter Three. The purpose of using the term is to denote that these garba are now considered to be "traditional" even though they are fairly modern.



Our conversation began with the discussion of garba, which is the most popularly known type of Gujarati music within the state, in India, and in the diaspora. I was a bit surprised that we began our conversation here, considering Shukla's vast knowledge of Gujarati music. However, the conversation resulted in a compelling comparison of the urban areas that I was examining, and it provided significant insight on ideas of preservation regarding Gujarati music and the language itself.

According to Shukla, the garba in Vadodara have "more of a light music presentation." Garba in Surat are a lot more classically based. In Ahmedabad, garba are fairly slow. They are a blend of light music and folk music, where Saumil and Shyamal Munshi have completely "changed the dimension of garba." When I asked how the Munshi brothers have done this, Tushar Shukla responded that they are basically light music performers; however, they have taken tunes of more modern, light classical music, and they have retained the style of traditional garba, particularly the basic rhythmic structure and the lyrics of the songs that are sung. The musical meaning of the garba increases with the audience's aesthetic involvement. Shukla explains that there is an entire demographic of listeners who do not play garba but who simply listen to the music. In Bombay, there are more individuals involved who have some ties to the film industry, so the orchestration is rather impressive, and the style of presentation is also important.

Garba has gone through many evolutions. When it went to the stage, it became more composed. When it came back to the neighborhood, modern music had an effect on the genre, particularly in terms of instrumentation. In a time





when Gujaratis are not very interested in the continuation of their language, and they are only seeing benefit to education and communication in English, Gujarati garba are still important to everyone. Shukla states, “As long as Gujarati garba are sung, there will be a use of the Gujarati language.”

A unique aspect of the transformation of garba is that it is a folk music genre. Folk music in Gujarat tends to be very specifically tied to the caste of individuals who utilize this music to celebrate major events in an individual’s life or specific events during the year. The modernization of this genre by Vyas and his contemporaries has resulted in a pan-Gujarati celebration of Navratri that occurs in the public sphere, outside of the traditional prayer to the garbo that might be kept in an individuals’ home, and where the aesthetics of a regional culture are displayed. While the garba that are performed still have elements of upper-class Hinduism in the lyrics, they represent the dynamic development of a pan-regional culture.

The effect of Vyas’s modernization of the traditional Gujarati folk aesthetic can be seen through a description of Gujarati sugam sangeet that was given by Rasbihari Desai, a prominent sugam sangeet musician whose musical prominence occurred in the time after Gujarati statehood was established. He said sugam sangeet should have three essential elements: the first is the understanding of lok sangeet, the second is the understanding of poetry, and the third is the understanding of a raga. Through Rasbihari Desai’s rendition of Vyas’s composition, one can see how these elements come together in this music. Musically, the composition juxtaposes elements of lok sangeet and Hindustani



classical music, while also articulating the poetry through the use of vocal embellishments.

As sugam sangeet developed, however, it made extensive use of complex language and poetry, which took sugam sangeet away from the ordinary listener. I had found a connection with Avinash Vyas's music, and to a super elite crowd. The role of poet announcers, who often sit during sugam sangeet concerts to provide a commentary and context between songs, became essential. Gujarati ghazal rose to an increasing popularity during this time. The music also seemed to be getting more homogenized and more applicable to a smaller audience of people, which was highly educated, middle-aged adults; therefore, Shyamal and Saumil Munshi's great contribution to sugam sangeet was to record according to subcategories to help audiences find sugam sangeet that was relatable to them. I particularly knew the Munshi brothers' songs because of their repertoire for younger people. When I asked about it, Saumil Munshi, who I met with in his office (his profession, aside from being a prominent sugam sangeet musician, is as a medical doctor), told me that it would be easier for him to just give the history of his and his brother's musical career to answer my questions about their music.

The Munshi brothers have been working professionally and commercially as musicians for the past thirty years. This was the first time I had heard the word "commercial" being used in a discussion of Gujarati music. Munshi explained that when he and his brother were younger, they would memorize poetry and ghazals. From 1980, they have been working on sugam sangeet with a performance focus. At this point, they saw what Saumil Munshi refers to as a



“vacuum.” By this, they mean that they saw “no bridge between the different individuals involved in Gujarati music,” who would mostly be the poets, the singers, the composers, and the audiences. They were wondering why this music was not becoming popular. It was popular only among a small group of people. According to Saumil Munshi, a bridge between these different people had not been made. Munshi then further explained to me the different individuals involved in sugam sangeet performance. This is when I began to understand that he meant the lack of “bridge” made Gujarati a less holistic experience, which was fairly far removed from potential listeners.

According to Munshi, the first word of a poet is God’s gift. The composer then takes this music and decides a raga and *tala* (a rhythmic pattern), the usage of scales in different aspects, and the orchestration. Then, the singer prepares their own voice, learns the song, and adds embellishments and variations to prepare the song. All of these three aspects of the song-making process are separate creativities. Then, the audience must judge, in the five to seven minutes of performance, whether this song is good or bad.

Munshi says that there was very little work that had been done with simple lyrics and poetry, and he and his brother felt that sugam sangeet had only been composed for a certain demographic of people. At the same time, people did not really understand what sugam sangeet was at that point. Munshi implied this lack of understanding was, and still is, unfortunate, especially because as Munshi says, “this is applied music”; at each stage, work is done with a thoughtful approach.



When I asked Munshi at which point he and his brother began working with the composition of sugam sangeet to make it more accessible, he responded that they began working with sugam sangeet differently in approximately 1984; until then, he and his brother were making the same kind of music that was the norm at the time. The Munshi brothers wanted to bring young people into the genre of sugam sangeet. Munshi explained that they wanted to bring children into this genre, and they wanted to bring in people who did not know anything about sugam sangeet or poetry. For those people to be interested in sugam sangeet, however, songs needed to be written.

So, Munshi says, they began to work in a “reverse manner.” This means that they did not look to their own inspiration to create lyrics, compositions, or a particular kind of performance; they began by focusing on the audience. They categorized music into four categories: chanchal, sheetal, nirmal, and komal. The komal category is for kids only.<sup>16</sup> Sheetal is for those who appreciate lyrics and ghazal. Chanchal is for youth, which is mostly defined as teenagers who may not be sophisticated enough to listen to complex lyrics but who have outgrown children’s songs. From what Munshi demonstrated to me of these songs, it is noticeable that there is not often an extremely deep poetic meaning for this type of music. The poetry is set to a more modern tune that is likeable. This way, Munshi says, the audience takes ownership for the song. The idea behind the creation of this category, according to Munshi, is that if this young audience begins to listen to this type of Gujarati music, they might eventually begin to

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<sup>16</sup> See Figure 2 of the Appendix





listen to more complex music. However, Munshi says that he and his brother realized that they had to give them the possibility of listening to Gujarati music. The final category, nirmal, is devotional or bhakti music.

After determining these categories, the Munshi brothers came up with a listeners' forum called Swar Setu, for who they perform six programs each year. In 2010, Saumil told me that it will be the tenth year of the forum. For this forum, the Munshi brothers design a themed program. From Utran<sup>17</sup> to the New Year,<sup>18</sup> they have programs that correspond to each festival.

The Munshi brothers noticed that when individuals go to see a film, they will tend to sit through the entire movie even if it is not very good because there is a story being told. Based on this idea, the Munshi brothers thought that they should change the “packaging of their performances to revolve around a story.” They write songs on a lot of different subjects; therefore, they said that there is a lot of creativity required on their part, especially since poems (that would become the lyrics for songs) have not been written on all of the subjects that they want to focus on for a musical program. Saumil says that his brother, Shyamal, is a poet. Tushar Shukla is actually his brother-in-law, and their other friends also write poems for them on various subjects. So, Saumil Munshi said that their entire approach has changed by writing poems that serve as lyrics that they then write melodies for to create songs.

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<sup>17</sup> Utran is a kite flying festival that occurs in mid-January, which is very fondly celebrated in Gujarat.

<sup>18</sup> The New Year refers to Diwali.



Saumil Munshi then showed me some of the programs that they have made. The theme for one of these programs was birds, and the invitation for the concert featured birds. It provides an aesthetic theme and a sense anticipation of the audience to know what the program will feature. They have done fifty-one theme-based programs. The goal is to present fresh performances with new songs and ideas. For example, there was an entire theme-based program on school, where the Munshi brothers sang songs that had to do with various school subjects. Each program has three dimensions – the story, the theme, and the songs, and Munshi believes that the audiences appreciate the “totality” of the programs.

Narration during sugam sangeet concerts provides a rather unique element. During the concerts that I attended, the narrator provided stories, jokes, and other types of commentary to transition between the various subjects featured in song lyrics. When I asked Munshi about his thoughts of the role of narration during a sugam sangeet concert, he told me that he believes that the narration is essential because it gives the audience a platform for the concert itself.

We also discussed the composition and musical elements of the songs. Since the programs that the Munshi brothers present are rather unique because they are tied together by a thematic concept, I wondered what kind of thought process is involved in creating the compositions of the songs. Munshi stated that the songs are not necessarily modern, but they are composed according to styles that the Munshi brothers believe will be well-received and will suit the song itself. I then asked him about the integration of new sounds, such as the guitar, in their compositions. Munshi explained that they determine if they are going to integrate



a new sound based on the flavor, color, or sound of the new element that they are incorporating. For example, they utilized the digital recording of a train, which they recorded themselves at the train station, to make train sounds for a children's song.

Munshi states that they have had a very strong response to this program. People who had never purchased a sugam sangeet ticket have become fans of the programs that the Munshi brothers produce. The Munshi brothers go with the premise that a person who appreciates sugam sangeet, and who is already a connoisseur, will be fan of these programs. However, the goal is to encourage those who have not extensively listened to sugam sangeet before to become interested in the music. Munshi states that they are also thinking about coming to the United States and Canada with this particular concept of theme-based musical concerts, although they have performed in the United States and in the United Kingdom previously to Gujarati audiences. Munshi explained to me that he and his brother travel to share their music with primarily Gujarati audiences, within India as well to locations such as Calcutta and Bangalore. Munshi said that they have also had the opportunity to perform in the Netherlands, where his sister lives, and they performed at a British school for approximately forty school children, only one of which was Gujarati. They had provided transliterations of the songs that they performed, which were mostly children's songs, and they found that their audience was very interested in the program and it was well received.



During my interview with Saumil Munshi, we focused largely on the performance aspect of sugam sangeet and how these performances are received by sugam sangeet audiences. Munshi demonstrates the ability to access his audience's musical preferences, and to negotiate these preferences with his own desire to share sugam sangeet with them, in order to create musical programs that current audiences will enjoy and new audiences will be drawn to. His aims to create and maintain the interest of listeners, but he does not necessarily strive to change the genre that he is working with. He strives, by the use of thematic relevance, to find a place for their genre in the listener's musical understanding. The Munshis strive to make a framework for sugam sangeet that has a place in the record store. When I did go to a large bookstore in Ahmedabad, the music of the Munshi brothers was quite prominently displayed and easy to find.

The Munshi brothers have modernized sugam sangeet for its new audience by incorporating sounds, instrumentation, and melodies that would be of interest to a new listener. Meanwhile, they maintain the traditional nature of sugam sangeet by utilizing the philosophy of Avinash Vyas, which is that Gujarati sugam sangeet should be comprehensible to a mass audience. An example of this is a song that the Munshi brothers have written the lyrics and composition for that is a parody on modern life. It is about a man from the previous millennium who will not drink Pepsi or Thums Up, does not like Coke, but who will happily drink tea-less chai when offered some. I find that the easy-going, slightly Westernized introductory tune has a somewhat vintage feel, which begins to draw the listener into a sonic space that is somewhat ambiguously defined. This introduction





makes the entrance of the singers, and the lyrics that they sing rather appealing. The delivery of the song is narrative in form.

Sugam sangeet's development has clearly shown an ability to negotiate the needs of the lyricists, composers of music, performers, and audiences, all of whom are seen as completely unique entities, because each of the individuals involved with the different parts of making a sugam sangeet song do not always work collaboratively. When I asked an informant what current listeners of sugam sangeet want from their music, she stated, "There is a larger emphasis on lyricism and classically-based music. Media influences how people perceive music, through television programs such as SRGMP."<sup>19</sup> I began to notice that media, especially television, is one of the primary ways through which Gujaratis consume music. In Surat, the Internet is also particularly important for sharing music, especially through sites such as tahuko.com for the Gujarati music setting. One interesting thing to note, however, is that tahuko.com was created and is maintained by a member of the Gujarati diaspora. Gujarati music has a significant role in the diaspora, allowing individuals to stay connected to their homeland through the language and through the social occasions that the concerts themselves provide. In Gujarat itself, the music has a different role. It serves as a

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<sup>19</sup> SRGMP is a talent competition show that has been airing on television since approximately 1995 and is broadcasted on Zee TV. What makes the show unique is that famous classical and film musicians have served as hosts and judges of the competition, which features unknown singers from across India as contestants. The format of the show has changed many times, and the most popular of the show's versions are the ones that feature young children. The show is family-friendly and extremely popular within India and the diaspora.



platform to discuss local, social interests, as well as to express regional sentiments.

In her book *Regionalism and the Reading Class*, Wendy Griswold (2008) states that regional culture expresses and creates a sense of place for individuals. In the case of modern-day Gujarat, I believe that regional culture has led to the creation of a sonic place for Gujaratis to negotiate the role of traditionally-based music in a setting where they are exposed to a variety of pan-(North) Indian aesthetics through the many channels available to them through the television, radio, and internet.

According to D.W. Meinig, assertive regional culture, which is called regionalism and promotes cultural expression, is “characteristic of a group of people who are deep-rooted and dominant in a particular territory, who are conscious of their identity as deriving from a common heritage, and who share a common language and basic patterns of life” (Meinig 1986, 80). This describes the Gujarati situation exactly as it is currently being articulated through the milieu of Gujarati sugam sangeet.

In the current situation, especially in Surat, the expansion of business and trade has led to a mass migration of workers from all over northern India to settle in Surat. With them, they brought the increased use of various dialects of the Hindi language, different foods and social customs, varying religious beliefs, and a vastly different sense of culture. Schools, which were primarily taught in the Gujarati medium for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, began to teach more in Hindi and English, which are the two primary languages of business. The decreased use of



Gujarati in schools meant that schoolchildren were less fluent in Gujarati, especially the literary Gujarati that sugam sangeet increasingly utilized as it developed as a genre, and Hindi and English music, along with its particular set of aesthetics, were adopted by a new generation of younger people whose television, radio, and internet experience have also been saturated by the Bollywood film industry.

However, this is not to say that there is not an interest in music. When I first arrived in Surat, I was warned that Surat was a bit less musically inclined than Baroda with its deeply rooted classical music tradition and Ahmedabad with its folk music. I found that there were approximately ten recording studios in the city of Surat. When I asked a young composer where the demand for these studios was coming from, he explained that a lot of the music produced was being used for advertising. He added that the use of recording studios by families with the capital to produce their own music was also a fashionable trend because of the television music programs and competitions that most families watch.

In this media-savvy and incredibly receptive urban Gujarati setting, I found that the production of new types of Gujarati music is considered to be the next stage in Gujarati sugam sangeet after the music of the Munshi brothers. This music finds its melody through the compositions of Mehul Surti and its voice through the lyricism of individuals such as Pragna Vashi. Through the music of these two music-makers, one can see how sugam sangeet is being used as a tool to advocate Gujarati culture. Through the example of these two individuals and



their music, I aim to demonstrate the intention and purpose with which current Gujarati music is being made.

Mehul Surti is a young music composer in his early 30s. He records music at his two studios in the city of Surat, and he is especially interested in work that promotes the Gujarati language. He composes for and produces commercial and professional recordings, as well as music for television, radio, and state government programs. Surti cites local music as the inspiration for his work; he often derives insight and ideas from tribal and folk music. He especially enjoys re-creating the sounds that he finds in these musics through electronic sounds that he creates. Surti is aware that younger people are especially inclined to listen to Bollywood music, so he tries to cater to those aesthetics by bridging the gap between native and popular sounds through technology. However, Surti enforces that his music is about innovation and not about fusion. He also is interested in using fairly simple Gujarati poetry lyrics to compose to, because he believes that songs are more meaningful if words that they use can be fully understood.

The conversation of the continuation of tradition versus the perceived notions of authenticity within Gujarati music culture is one that Surti is quite interested in. As mentioned previously, sugam sangeet began to flourish around the 1950s (which marks the point at which independence had been gained but regionalism became a focus for Gujarati people). However, according to Surti, people have come to expect a certain sound out of sugam sangeet; therefore, he believes that the genre is not really moving forward. Older people are not willing





to accept a new sound, and it appears, the observations of a local music connoisseur who facilitated the meeting between me and Surti, that they are more interested in the lyrics.

Surti expresses a disdain for sonically homogenous music. He believes that people should listen to a variety of sounds and incorporate them into their music. Surti cites hip hop as a type of music that he does not know very much about but that he listens to. He quotes Lata Mangeshkar and the fact that she does not approve of fusion; he agrees. He believes that it is more important to be innovative.

One of his more recent collaborations was with a local high school teacher named Pragna Vashi. Vashi is a local poet, whose work tends to focus on women's issues. She finds that poetry allows her to express issues that ordinary conversation or writing through prose would not, especially in the case of more socially sensitive women's issues such as domestic violence and abuse, and she tends to use the local newspaper as a place to showcase her poetry and begin social dialogue on pertinent topics for the community.

In the CD that Surti and Vashi collaborated on together, each track features poetry that Vashi wrote which corresponds to the different stages of a woman's life. She says that she was inspired to write on these topics after having raised her two daughters, both of who are now married; she finds it meaningful to have music through which she can connect with women of different generations. I believe that it is safe to say that the music that Surti and Vashi have created serves the same purpose as the indigenous musics that are now categorized as folk



music in Gujarat; these musics delineate certain life markers, as well as seasonal markers, to provide an inter-generational camaraderie and sense of placement. Although many Gujarati urbanites learn folk songs through their families, I believe that the creation of new musics in urban settings, that serve the same function that folk songs do, is a significant development in urban music making.

A track from their CD that best encompasses all of the aspects of Surti and Vashi's music-making that I have described thus far is called *Dolariyo*, which is a kind of flower that blooms in Gujarat during the springtime. According to Vashi, the song is written in the style of a *lok geet* (folk song), and it captures the essence of a spring time fair where individuals, usually young males and females, often meet and fall in love. The most unique feature of this music is that the cadences of the lyrics and the dominant words determine the prevalent rhythmic structures in the song. The melody of the song is typical of a springtime folksong; therefore, most Gujaratis are able to determine the type of song based on the melody. Finally, the song features many sound effects from film music, which contextualizes the emotions of the song for those who are not able to glean this information from the words themselves or from the style of the folk song melody.

When listening to the music, one notices pertinent musical aspects. The music begins with a rather "funky" introduction, which has the style of the soundtrack of "Slumdog Millionaire," particularly the musical interludes that were featured when the two protagonists of the film were coming together at the film's conclusion and that utilized a lot of modern and electronic sounds. However, this introduction is juxtaposed with an actual composition style that is



“traditionally” oriented toward the type of folk song that *Dolariyo* actually imitates. However, the Westernization of the track does continue with exaggerated movie score-like string sounds that highlight the energy and emotion of the song. The composition is very cohesive, and its traditional and modern elements ensure that a wide variety of listeners will be able to glean meaning from the music itself.

Toward the end of my time in India doing fieldwork, I had a conversation with Surti that focused largely on the process of making Gujarati music. He really stressed the collaborative nature of his work. For example, he explained that the words being sung, and the feeling (*bhav*) with which they are sung, are the most important part of a Gujarati sugam sangeet song. Therefore, he will have singers come into his studio and he will ask them to sing a song in the way which they would want to before he begins composing music. He explains all of the portions of the song that he must compose, such as all of the verses, the music that will open and close the song, and the music between the verses. However, he feels that it is most important to compose this music according to the words. Surti states that this is rather different from how Western music is composed; whereby, the lyrics and music are first set to each other and then a singer must learn how to sing the song. Surti states that his music is *lok bhogiya*, meaning that he writes his music for the sake of his audience rather than for himself. Therefore, it is important that they are able to derive meaning from the songs that they hear.

In discussing the complexity that has evolved in Gujarati sugam sangeet, I suggested to Tushar Shukla that the poet announcer has a very significant role to



play during the concert, because this person actually needs to ensure that the audience maintains their interest in the songs that are being sung, despite the complexity of the lyrics. He agrees with this observation. He adds that Ashit Desai, who was the main singer and composer of his time, selected the lyrics that he used from poems that were popular at the time. While these songs were greatly appreciated by those who understood the literature that was being used in these songs, Tushar Shukla explains that the “common man” felt distanced from these songs because he could not understand them.

However, this is beginning to change, because songs that are easily understood by the “common man” are now being written. However, the effects of the complex lyrics that had been utilized before are still being felt because composers had also adapted to a more complex composition style to match the sophistication of the complex lyrics that had previously dominated sugam sangeet. We then discussed the issue of Gujaratis in Gujarat not understanding or knowing their language. Therefore, there is a necessity to create lyrics and music that are more interesting to those who might not be able to understand Gujarati very well.

Surti deals with these issues by utilizing social media, such as Facebook, to interact with his audience. He also states that he really likes to write his compositions based on Mukul Choksi’s poetry. According to Surti, the language that is used for everyday songs should be the same language that is used in everyday conversation. Surti also understands that in the current media setting, he only has five minutes to perform a song; therefore, he tries not to use too much





of this time with complicated lyrics. An analogy that Surti utilizes is that SMS (short message service) allows a person the opportunity to utilize 160 characters to communicate; similarly, musical communication should be able to situate itself in a similarly abbreviated form.

Since Surti is commonly cited as the next generation of Gujarati sugam sangeet, I ask him how his music is different from that of earlier generation, citing the music of Ashit Desai and Shyamal and Saumil Munshi as examples to compare himself to. Surti states that there was less media in the earlier decades. Currently, there is a wealth of media, explains Surti, such as the internet, CDs, mp3s, and computers themselves. Therefore, listeners get their music from many different sources. Surti feels that he is well-equipped to compose for the savvy listener. He is essentially classically trained as a vocalist, and he has a lot of technology that allows him to use a lot of different sounds and techniques in his music; however, he states that he does not consider the computer to be a music maker, which he says is the role of people, while the computer functions as a recorder. Most important to his music-making process, Surti says, is that he listen to a lot of music. He states that music is music – it is not “good or bad,” but just a matter of choice. Therefore, he likes to incorporate as many elements as possible into his music to allows listeners a full experience when they listen to Gujarati sugam sangeet.

Surti demonstrates an ability to benefit from a musical-cultural agency, which was established through the evolution of sugam sangeet by musicians that preceded him, that has allowed Surti to create a regional voice that has meaning to



Gujarati listeners in an age where musical preferences are strongly influenced by media. Simultaneously, Gujarati sugam sangeet, as well as broader ideas on Gujarati music, have expanded the notion of how music promote a Gujarati regional identity. While the ultimate goal of Gujarati sugam sangeet has remained to be accessibility, this accessibility now has more to do with sounds that are relatable to a listener who is interested in a wide range of Indian and Western music, while maintaining easily understandable lyrics that are still able to communicate regional topics. To further understand these elements and further deconstruct the current identity of the Gujarati music scene, I turn to different aspects of urban music-making that are primarily based in Surat, and that provide greater insight on music listeners, music makers, and the interaction between them.



## Chapter Three – The Current Local Music Scene in the Urban Middle Class

### *Examining the Audiences of Surat*

To understand more about the music listeners of Surat, I decided to talk to individuals that are involved, or associated, with the three most prevalent genres of music and music-making in Surat, which are mediated music (for which I talked to radio announcers in Surat), garba (occurring during the most widely celebrated festival in Gujarat), and classical music (which has become an index of middle class music knowledge since the work of Bhatkhande and Paluskar). I had the conversations that are included in this chapter with radio announcers, a garba expert, and classical music teachers after several months of observing how music in Surat is consumed, particularly by noting listening habits that are common among those individuals who listen to the most popular genres. Therefore, my questions were often based on observations that I had made.

My discussions were permeated by the difference between the genres of music that are most popular in Surat, and how listeners identify with these different genres. The goal of these conversations was to understand how various identity factors affect how different kinds of music are heard and processed by listeners and what function music has in the lives of active listeners. Furthermore, I was able to gain insight on how mediated music plays a role in the lives of its



listeners and of individuals who have transitioned from being music students to become involved in making music themselves.

According to my informants, Surat has a strong interest in classical music and sugam sangeet. Most individuals tend to study sastriya sangeet to learn the basic concepts of music, and then they go on to sing sugam sangeet. To be able to sing sugam sangeet for *Akashvani Radio* (which is what All-India Radio is called), one needs to pass the audition test that is given in Vadodara. Each type of music has a singing test for their genre at their regional centre. During my interviews, I asked my informant to describe the individuals that would have an interest in singing at the radio station. I was told that there is a large interest in all ages of people – above and below forty years of age.<sup>20</sup>

There are different types of programs geared toward different demographics; for example, from 6:15 – 7 PM, there is a program that features local variations. Live programming is rare, so the sugam sangeet artists are pre-recorded. The recorded music is then played by the announcer. The programming includes local programs, youth programs, and programs for women. There also are programs that are for specific occasions, such as the rainy season and different festivals.

I asked an individual who works with radio programming how the listening of sugam sangeet is promoted by radio. My informant replied, in the case of Surat, there are some divisions among the public. Individuals near

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<sup>20</sup> Individuals associated with radio, as well as the planning of musical programs, often cited a greater interest in sugam sangeet among adults over the age of forty.





Varacha are from Saurashtra, and they prefer folk music. The rest of Surat prefers light music/sugam sangeet. The educated public, who can understand the lyrics, likes sugam sangeet. Surat's youth are beginning to prefer sugam sangeet. They learn classical music, not to become classical singers, but so they can sing sugam sangeet and ghazal. I was also told that most Surtis do not exclusively listen to one genre of music; they are likely to have favorite types of music in different genres.

The writing of Gujarati ghazals is historically based in Surat. Also, this genre of music has become trendy, so Surat, a major commercial center that tends to observe trends quite closely, has embraced the trend of ghazal. Most Surtis attribute their city's fondness for following trends to the business culture on which the economy of the city thrives. One of the most interesting new pieces of information that I uncovered while talking to those in radio was the idea that sugam sangeet, and especially ghazal, is a class-based music; those who can afford (to be educated) listen to it and will understand the complexity of the lyrics.

Area-specific dialects and cultures are reflected in folk music. Most often, the folk music in Surat is from Saurashtra, which is different from the folk music that is heard in Ahmedabad. One of the biggest tragedies, I was told, is that the music of south Gujarat is almost dead. One of the reasons why locally-based folk music has not been preserved is that in south Gujarat, radio came very late – south Gujarat did not have the patronage of kingdoms that would have helped its development. Therefore, a local Akashvani Radio station came relatively late to



Surat in the early 1990s. In addition, there is growth towards business, and not much cultural consciousness, which might historically be a reason why local folk music has faded.

When discussing social and cultural aspects of life in Surat, I was often told that the priorities of the people are to do business and to enjoy life. It is not only music that has been affected by this way of thinking; artwork has also been influenced by Surti tendencies to follow trends. The artwork that is available in Surat is also from Saurashtra as a representation of what is Gujarati; the embroidery work that was local to Surat is no longer prevalent. There used to be large showpieces of these embroidered pieces, but they are no longer being made.

There are so many divisions of music in Surat that exist outside of the popularized genres. There is the music of Saurashtra, tribal music, and actual south Gujarati folk music. There is recorded south Gujarati folk music available, but it was sung by a classical singer who did not keep the melodies of the folk music intact. In addition, Surat is located on the coast of the Arabian Sea, so there is folk music that comes from people who live near the sea and whose music is influenced by their location.

Politically, the public in Surat is not very strong; they are relatively silent because their main objective is business. Rajiv Gandhi came up with the concept of starting FM centres; he visualized that each district headquarter should have an FM radio station.<sup>21</sup> These stations happened within the form of a local radio

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<sup>21</sup> Anustup Basu explains that “liberalization of the economy was well under way during the premiership of Rajiv Gandhi (1984 – 9),” even though 1991 is usually marked as the year that India



station, which means that individuals had three hours of programming each day to serve as a local platform. There was no understanding of the meaning, or reasoning, for transmitting music and drama programs. However, radio created a public space for individuals to communicate. Over time it was realized that Surat is commercial, and money is plentiful in the city, which means that *Vividh Bharti* (programming with the intention education, information, and entertainment for people, which has included literature, classical music, and folk music) started being relayed here from Mumbai. Aside from *Vividh Bharti*, only three hours of radio programming on Aksahvani Radio each day are for original programming for Surat. The individuals at the station want the radio station to be a cultural centre.

Classical music is played a lot on *Vividh Bharti*, but an important role that *Vividh Bharti* serves is an educational one. Originally, it did not have any commercial programming. Around the time of Indian Independence in 1962, one of the former ministers did not want film music to be played either. Around 1957, people began to realize that individuals were listening to Radio Ceylon, so Mumbai *Vividh Bharti* was started for commercial programming. *Vividh Bharti* is under the All-India Radio banner; it is commercial and features commercial genres like film music.

So, in the three hours of daily programming, south Gujarati culture was originally promoted through music. Amrapali Desai explained to me that private

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“entered the globalizing process” because of the budget that Manmohan Singh passed that year (Basu 2010, 45).



FM, which is completely musical, also exists in Surat. So, Akashvani Radio had to decide how it was supposed to situate itself within the radio and musical environment of Surat. Desai is from Surat, so she believes strongly in the revival of Surti identity. She believes in reviving the public through its own voices and by covering the cultural activities in the city. Local musicians are promoted, as well as local organizations. Since December 6, 2009, there is a Sanskrit *sloka* (song-like religious verse) program that has begun each morning. The purpose is to bring the language back to the ears of the people and to disseminate good messages. Then at 8 AM, bhakti sangeet, light music, and ghazal are played. At 9:15 AM, a phone-in program occurs, whereby individuals can request the music that they want to hear. The following program is a women's program, where individuals talk about different topics and with different personalities. The music included in this program is light, folk, and garba. There is also a children's program where children's songs from film and local music are used.

Apparently, children's music is not being listened to as much; this change is attributed to the film industry, which has overtaken the space and consciousness for children's music. Desai wants to have programs that integrate film music and children's music together. She explains that schools used to have children prepare children's music as well. Desai says that the issue is that parents are not conscious of children's music, and they are too self-centered to think about what their children should be listening to.

Desai started looking for *prathna* (prayers) to play over the radio each day as a way to try to bring music back for children, but the schools that she asked for





these prathna said that they are not really being sung anymore. The only prathna that are available are “filmi prathna” (which are taken from, or composed according to, the style of film music). Desai remembers that her own school used to have wonderful prathna that used to be sung routinely with such good messages. During this conversation, I was accompanied by a local school teacher who recently retired; she started that some prathna are still being sung in schools. but the dhal becomes “filmi.” Jeevan Bharati, a school that Desai herself had attended, has a book of these prathna. The school teacher assured her that some of the old prathna are still available; they might sing filmi ones first, but they still know some of the older ones by title. The school teacher was afraid of having these sung at her school (a Hindi medium school) because the prathna are Gujarati, but they have been well-accepted. Desai strongly believes that these different formats of music should be passed on to people. Based on my ethnographic experiences, I believe that Desai’s convictions are agreed to by the mainstream. Even in the home where I stayed during my year of fieldwork, I awoke every morning to the sound of the students in the adjacent education college learning to sing prathna as part of their teacher training.

The lack of apparent music culture in Surat had made it difficult to identify salient features of popular Gujarati music in Surat. So, I asked my informants how bhakti sangeet, light music, and ghazal are different in Surat from the same genres in Ahmedabad and Vadodara. I was told that these genres have traditionally been more literary in Surat, although they are not necessarily this way now. There was no institution to save the music of this area. Musical artists



in Surat would sing compositions that were written in Baroda and Ahmedabad as a result. Folk music, such as *khaina* (songs sung by unmarried girls while sitting on a swing and churning butter), has not been preserved. There are still small groups of women that sing these songs, which will only be around as long as these women are alive.

As in my interview with Tushar Shukla, in the previous chapter, we also began to discuss garba to analyze the nuances of Gujarati music in Surat through this particular genre. There are three types of garba in Surat. The first is Nagiri garba, which is mixed folk and classical garba together; so, it is not straightforward garba, and it has a different kind of tala. The second type of garba is more folk-based. There is a third type of garba, which is stage garba, and it is differentiated by its performance space. It is a type of a classical dance form – the actions and the lyrics change, which makes it different from *sherri* (neighborhood) garba. Therefore, Nagiri garba and folk-based garba are functional types of garba that are sung and danced to within neighborhood settings, and that will vary in lyrics and dhal based on the individuals that are participating. Meanwhile, stage garba is performed on the stage, and its function is to elevate garba, a folk dance that is used to celebrate Navratri, to the status of a classical dance form.

In Surat, most neighborhoods have an open community area, which is called a party plot. It serves as a space where weddings can be held, and celebrations, such as garba during Navratri, are situated. The party plot represents a commercialization of the neighborhood scene, whereby spaces are rented,



musicians are hired to perform garba (as opposed to their being sung by the dancers or by the better musicians within a neighborhood), and individuals buy tickets to attend the festivities. Desai was interested to note that sherri garba is becoming trendy again, after many years of youth going to party plots with their passes. This also means that there is less of an audience to watch the party plot garba. When Soli Kapadia, a famous Surti musician who is now based in Mumbai, came, Desai went to see party plot garba, where individuals do not dance in a circle, but rather in their own groups (often with matching outfits). Desai said that the entire process of garba has become very commercialized. In Vadodara, individuals might be dancing in plots, but they still maintain the concept of the circle.

During my fieldwork, discussions often centered around the change in garba performance in recent years, which almost always resulted in a discussion about how current garba reflects the social changes in Gujarati society. The most popular topic has been how garba affects parents and children. In Gujarati society, children live with their parents until they are married; after marriage, most males continue to live either in the family home or in close proximity to their parents, and most females live with their new husband and the husband's family. While the joint family is slowly undergoing changes, almost all young adults live with their families until marriage, unless they are studying away from home or working away from home (however, both situations are fairly rare). Sherri garba traditionally lasts for a couple of hours each night, as opposed to the party plot garba which are considerably longer. Many young adults go to party



plot garba with their friends, and they are a lot more flamboyant - costumes are changed every night. Social changes, such as the ideas of boyfriends and girlfriends, have emerged through pop culture influences, and these changes and their consequences (such as parental disapproval of relationships and unplanned pregnancies) are seen during Navratri.

My first real sense of how widespread these social issues are during Navratri occurred when noticing the news headline “Spyware to Watch Kids this Navratri” prominently on the front page of the *Times of India*. The article goes on to state, “This Navratri parents are going to keep a mobile watch on their kids! For a large number of worried parents detective agencies are out this festive season” (Mehta 2009). The article goes on to describe that a parent who used to hire detective agencies is now installing software on his children’s mobile phone. Desai believes that it is a bit of a social tragedy that male and female relationships have been so affected by these issues, because she states that male and female friendships currently seem to be increasingly rare at the public level among young adults.

Although Surtis are quite savvy of overall trends, a common statement that I heard was that individuals do not have a sense of local, social issues. For example, they were tuned into Michael Jackson’s death, but local arts situations are not in the public knowledge of most local people. This seems to be a reflection of the media, which pays a lot of attention to international issues but does not highlight local issues. Akashvani Radio tries to serve as a radio station of the people, especially in a local context.





I then asked where the private radio stations originate. The government introduced the frequencies of private radio; they sell the radio space. Since television started, the nature of radio programming has changed. The effect of popular culture radio on the individuals that are associated with it is significant: the glamorization of different projects leads to a mindset in people that causes personal problems. The public radio space is much more orthodox in that way.

### ***Space and Enactment: A Further Study of Garba***

Shortly after I arrived in Surat at the end of August, talk of Navratri began to fill the social space of Surat. I knew that this would be an important event for me because of the music and dance involved. Being a diasporic Gujarati, I have been attending Navratri celebrations since I was a young child, and I am fairly well acquainted with the music, dance steps, outfits, and religious significance of the holiday. However, the process of experiencing this holiday quickly moved beyond the cultural re-enactment that I had experienced in the diaspora and became a music study of the folk icons of music “tradition” placed into the indices of classical and popular music, where individual and regional identities are being negotiated in a modern setting.

As the Navratri season came closer in Surat, there was a great deal of preparation that I had never observed in diasporic celebrations. First, there were many boutiques selling *chania choli*, the traditional outfit worn by Gujarati females during Navratri. One could buy ready-made *chania choli*; however, the



more fascinating aspect of the event was the boutiques where one could design one's own chania choli in order to have a unique creation to wear for Navratri. I went to one of these boutiques and had a consultation with the two owners, where we discussed the kind of style I was looking for, my favorite colors, and even the kind of use that I would have for this kind of an outfit after Navratri. The boutique owners took the process very seriously – I often got (multiple) phone calls when they were buying fabric, at various points during the stitching process, and when the outfit was ready for trials.

The conversations about garba thus far in my dissertation, with Tushar Shukla in Chapter Two with regards to garba being one of the best enduring aspects of Gujarati music and a comparative of musical styles in the eastern cities of Gujarat and with Amrapali Desai in the previous section, were had toward the end of my fieldwork in Gujarat when I had already had a chance to observe Navratri and spend a lot of time reflecting on the holiday, its practices, and their meaning. However, the above scene of my experience of buying chania choli, along with most of my ethnographic experiences of Navratri was had very early during my time in Gujarat. What I did not realize at the time was that the process of buying this set of chania choli was my preparation of how I would present my identity during Navratri.

The concern of identity permeates conversation surrounding Navratri, such as the Gujarat government's awareness of the significance of Navratri for Gujarati culture and the importance of its promotion. In a *Surat Times* article dated September 19, 2009, I read,



D K Rao, secretary, tourism, pilgrim and devsthan. Gujarat government, says, 'Navratri festival has stood apart as the world's longest dance carnival. And the Gujarat government is taking the initiative to add more vigour to it by partnering with the industry. The potential that the craft, religious tourism, and the rich heritage have is immense. It is during this festival that we encourage exchange of culture as artists from various states and countries too are invited to take part' (Malini 2009).

The organizers of the Navratri events put a great deal of thought into the planning of Navratri based on the current year's trends. It is a complex thought process that involves many different aspects, as I learned through an article in the *Surat Times* dated September 5, 2009.

Initially, Navratri was known for the fashion that it created during the festival. But today, with Navratri going global, it's a different story. Jaydeep Mehta, director of an event management company has been organizing garba events since the past seven years. 'Somewhere people have made it a festival of fashion, which doesn't have the genuine *sherri garba* as youngsters sway to Bollywood numbers. We have decided to portray the original *sherri garba* and create an ambience of the old city – a 3D Bhadra Fort, Teen Darwaja and *Rani No Hajiro* on the grounds. People do dance to Bollywood songs but when the original garba songs are played they enjoy the most,' says Jaydeep. Agrees singer and music composer Saumil Munshi, 'Amdavadis love the traditional songs over Bollywood numbers. We do have modern instruments for that punch. It is only for the flavour and excitement that we use latest instruments. People love the *dhol* beats only.' While there are some who are not interested in going traditional. Says event manager, Vishal Savaliya, 'We are trying to get innovative. The first few days we have got software that will churn out *garba* songs in Bollywood style. We are also getting an orchestra from Mumbai and the singer will be performing in the midst of the crowd. The last 3-4 days we are planning to go completely traditional – authentic *sherri garba* with some *mehendi* stalls' (Mulchandani 2009).

Preparations for Navratri celebrations also included dance classes.

Advertisements for dance classes are ubiquitous on major roads in Surat. I attended one of these classes prior to Navratri, where people of all ages come together to dance to popularized garba and Bollywood songs. At the class that I



attended, most of the individuals participating were in their early teens; however, there are also adults (all of whom were female) and young kids. The two primary instructors were in their early 20s, both male. The studio was run by a middle-aged male, who was happy to talk to me about the classes.

I learned that most of the people in attendance at the class were preparing for various garba competitions to be held around the city during Navratri, but there were also some that were learning to dance more generally for the nine night duration of Navratri. When I questioned why these people would need to learn such complicated steps, I learned that individuals actually use these dance steps as a way of delineating social space during Navratri. The “party plot” garba have taken garba out of a localized neighborhood space and have placed them in a large, fairly impersonal stadium. Within these stadiums, there are a large number of people who dance, but there are also many people who attend just to watch. Among those who dance, matching outfits and choreographed dance steps to different songs are ways in which space is delineated. Social groups might be delineated through family ties, friendships, and school affiliations.

I attended one of these Navratri celebrations at Indoor Stadium, with my cousin and some of his friends. When we entered, around 11 PM, the entire stadium was full of people jumping up and down on the floor. To me, it looked somewhat like a mosh pit with random instrumentals, some of which sounded more disco-style and one which was distinctly *bhangra* (popularized music based on music from the region of Punjab). There were a lot of people sitting down within the stadium, and the musicians were on a complex stage set-up. Other than





voice, all of the instrumentation was modern and most featured synthesizers and drum sets.

The actual garba dances were relatively complicated, reminiscent of the garba class that I had attended. As I had anticipated, many people were wearing matching outfits. There were also a lot of different sherri-inspired costumes featured, which were in style that year according to the *Times of India* articles that had forecasted trends for Navratri 2009. Some individuals even had dances choreographed with props. There were competitions for categories such as best dance and best costume that were announced at the end of the evening.

I experienced an exclusively youth-oriented garba at the Law College near my home. It was held on the morning of Friday, September 25, 2009. The celebrations began with fireworks. All of the students appeared wearing traditional-style garba clothing, and disco-style garba blared for the next several hours (which featured a very strong bass and a relatively simple melody line). The entire scene was reminiscent of a club but the music was unmistakably modernized garba (based on the lyrics and the rhythmic structures that I heard, which were identifiable garba songs that have become part of the standard repertoire in traditional and modern settings).

The only garba that I was able to observe outside of Surat were in Vadodara. This was a completely different experience from the garba atmosphere in Surat. The garba was outdoors, on a lit street, within a cricket field. To the right of the field was a Mataji Temple, where most individuals went to pray before entering the garba. There was a strong security presence that included



bomb-sniffing dogs and police with whistles, who kept the flow of the garba moving during the actual event.

We arrived around 10 PM and there was no one on the cricket field and seats within the first three rows were beginning to fill. Musicians were announcing advertisements in a style similar to how announcements are read on a radio broadcast. Around 10:15 PM, a Ganesh stotram (a prayer to the Lord Ganesh) was recited, and the musicians, who were sitting on a stage in the center of the cricket field, announced the beginning to a three-tali (a garba that is based on a triple meter to which women dance by clapping in counts of three). They asked people to keep moving within the formations, which were the traditional circular pattern of garba. The organization of the garba was very different from the stadium garba I had attended in Surat where individuals mostly danced within small groups. All of the garba were easily recognizable and followed the same simple steps that I have seen in diasporic celebrations of Navratri. Although there was a synthesizer, it was the only modern instrument that was part of the instrumentation. After the first garba was finished, there was an announcement about a person that had died in Kashmir. There were about two moments of silence held for the person, after which people recited “Bharata Mata Ki Jay!” three times. It was quite forceful and a bit surprising, because there had not been announcements like these in Surat.

The announcers asked that people stay aware of their children, and then they began another three-tali. Approximately eight to ten different groups developed on the ground of people doing garba. Most individuals were



“traditionally” dressed, not quite as trendy as Surat. I am told that the college garba tend to have the trendiest styles, whereas most of the neighborhood celebrations are relatively low-key. We stayed for most part of the three-tali before leaving. I was told that there would also be a “Mumbai train” and a raas that would conclude the event within the next half an hour.

In contrast to these socially-based garba, I also attended garba competitions, where the music and dance are showcased as a classical dance form. This is where I was able to learn the most about garba, the different styles, and their meaning. The first competition that I attended took place at the Vidya Bharti School, which is a Hindi-medium school in Surat. I asked why there are so many Hindi schools in the area; apparently, more and more people are coming to Gujarat, particularly Surat, to benefit from the thriving economy. Their children do not have Gujarati-speaking parents at home; therefore, it becomes necessary to teach the children in Hindi.

The competition was the city-level portion of a state-wide garba competition that is held every Navratri. The set-up of the competition was relatively slow, and we learned, through general chatter that was overheard throughout the evening, that the school had not been very keen on hosting the event. As a result, there were only four main stage lights and a poorly-managed sound system for the musicians. There was supposed to have been a stage-microphone, because the traditional garba require for the girls to sing and dance at the same time. They are also judged based on their rhythmic sensibility, which is kept track of through clapping, but the effect of the microphone was not heard.



The traditional garba involved staying in formation, which is one large circle, at all times. Some of the more complex garba tended to change tempo several times during the composition, with choreography that included whole body movement. During the evening, I learned that the garba in Surat tends to be more “traditional” and based on ragas – these garba tend to be quite slow in presentation; whereas, Ahmedabad tends to feature more folk-based garba.

The raas dances were done mostly in the Saurashtra style. Most of the dances were about Krishna, with all of the boys acting out Krishna’s part. The raas had various formations and tended to be quite theatrical, which included breaking formations, sitting down, and throwing around *dandiya* (sticks that are used during the dancing of raas). The boys did not sing as they danced, and the dances were very fast-paced.

Modern garba concluded the program. In the modern garba performances, girls do not sing while they dance, and the dance formations are more complex and usually involve props. Some of the more popular props included lit candles and incense.

The second garba competition that I attended was at LP Savani School. The school is situated within a new development, with many high rise apartments. I went with an individual who knew one of the guests of honor, an older woman who does a lot of society work within Surat. The competition seemed to be full of older secondary school-aged kids, which is an older demographic from the previous competition whose participants averaged around seventh grade.





The girls were wearing sparkly abhla-styled costumes and most had relatively complicated props. There was a combination of recorded and live music soundtracks. The recorded tracks included combinations such as mandolin and synthesizer or sitar and flute. They included male and female vocalists with sound effects through microphones, but most of the garba were relatively recognizable. There was also a set-up of musicians on the right side of the stage that some groups used. This included vocalists, harmonium, tabla, dhol, sitar, and flute. The “live” garba tended to be slower and more raga-based.

The third competition that I attended was also a showcase, and it was held at Gandhi Smriti – the major performance stage in Surat. This competition involved individuals from Surat (and around Surat). It was hosted by a wealthy couple and their Enviro Company, whose advertisement was mentioned at the beginning of the program, during the lighting of the candles (to showcase Indian culture to Singaporean clients), and prior to the garba starting. The sound system was good; however, most of the garba were repeats from the competition at the beginning of the season. All of the individuals were wearing different, and somewhat flashier, costumes.

It was interesting how much the “atmosphere” of the show resembled a middle class gathering within the diaspora, and it made me consider the fact that many of the middle class individuals that live in the urban developed areas of Surat are themselves working hard to preserve their regional culture. A lot of the more traditional aspects of garba, such as gheria (men who dress as women), people dancing with dolls, and sherri garba are becoming scarcer, and almost



impossible to find, within Surat. When I asked individuals about these events, they tried hard to locate them and I more often, than not, heard the response that these traditions had not been present for the past several years.

After having attended garba in all of the different spaces that I have described, I met with Naynaxiben Vaidya to get more information on Navratri and garba. She explained to me that there are four different things called garba – the actual garbo, the song, the dance, and the popular form that is being used today.

Garba began within the sherri (neighborhood) and eventually came to the stage. *Prachin* (traditional) garba includes the poetry of Narsinh Mehta, Dayaram, and Meerabai. It was written in “original” ragas (presumably the melody was decided by the poet writing the garba). These garba were passed down orally from the poet to “performers.” There was not much variation to the music in these garba; however, there did tend to be a variation among the different actions performed. Individuals also wrote their own garba, which became known as lok geet (folk songs). All garba that were written after the time of Dayaram are considered to be *arvachin* (modern) and are based on sastriya sangeet ragas.

Garba was promoted to the stage through government and society-sponsored competitions, a lot of which occurred after Indian Independence. During the era prior to Indian Independence, many garba were written for expressing sentiments about the Independence Movement. In Gandhinagar, an organization was made that focused on regional music preservation. It became defunct; however, another one has taken its place.



Naynaxiben has written a book that stands as an authority piece on garba. Her book begins with her background, as well as the explanation of why and how she took an interest in garba. Her mother had a double master's degree in music, and her father was the secretary of a Gujarati society in Madhya Pradesh. Her father worked for the Western Railway, so the family moved a lot. Although she was educated in Rajasthan, she found an interest in garba. In the book, there is information, all of which has been gained from over thirty years of personal experience, on how garba are created and how they function. She has a section of diagrams that describe how formations work in sherri garba and how they work in stage garba; she also explains how these dances are adapted from sherri to the stage.

A garba is set by first explaining a poem to the singers. There is a comparison chart explaining how music can work in traditional and modern garba, as well as where the musicians should be placed. All of this information is gleaned from Naynaxiben's experience, as well as mark sheets that are established during various garba competitions. The mark sheets can be determined by the government and passed down to judges and participants, or they might be decided upon by the judges themselves.

So, as mentioned, there are three different kinds of garba – parchin, arvachin, and sherri garba. According to Naynaxiben, there are three kinds of prachin garba – Ambama (to the goddess for whom Navratri is celebrated), samajik (based on events in society), and dharmic (religious). The latter are written by poets such as Narsinh Mehta, Dayaram, and Vallabhbat. Prachin



garba also include the garba from Saurashtra (western Gujarat), as well as the garba that come from the languages of small towns. Patriotic garba are also in the prachin garba category.

Arvachin garba are performed on the stage. Each city in Gujarat has a different version of these modernized garba styles, which also include commercialized garba. A professional music group might form itself to sing garba. The music for modern garba utilizes a microphone and an orchestra, which may be any combination of instrumentation (some of which might be electronic and of which the most popular instrument is keyboard). In addition to the music, an extra importance is placed on costumes, which might change annually depending on current styles and trends. These garba are frequently featured on radio and the Doordarshan television channel.

According to Naynaxiben, everything in life changes, so garba also has the right to change. Choreography of stage garba changes the practice of it. Garba is a visual and sonic art. Competitions occur so that the youth of today can get a sense of how significance of prachin garba. Arvachin garba music is made intentionally complicated to demonstrate its importance as an art form, which is also how arvachin garba is differentiated from sherri garba. The garba are developed within rehearsals.

There are very particular rules for each style of garba. In prachin garba, performers stay in a circle that does not break. They use bells, dhol, bansuri (flute), and shehnai (oboe-like instrument with a reed) as instrumentation. The dhal (rhythmic pattern) is not to be changed. The instrumentalists can sit in the





middle of the circle or at the side of the stage. The songs up to the time of Dayaram are used; anything after this is considered to be arvachin. The costumes that are worn are part of (historic) everyday clothing.

In arvachin garba, the circle can break, and it can come back together again. The instruments listed in the previous paragraph as being used in prachin garba, along with tabla, sitar, violin, and harmonium, can be used in arvachin garba. The bandish (composition) of the garba can be on several different ragas. The musicians cannot sit on the stage; instead, they are supposed to sit to the side of the stage. They can take different kind of talas, and talas can be interchanged. Newer poets' work is used, and different types of costumes are used.

In the case of my garba-viewing experiences, as I previously described, I saw a government competition at the Vidya Bharti School, a private school competition at LP Savani, and a privately sponsored competition from the Enviro Corporation. Garba is promoted in different ways in the city; at this point, it is passed on from individuals who have studied the art form and who can teach others. For example, Naynaxiben has trained Bhismaben and Sunil Mody's daughter-in-law, who now work with garba for young kids during each Navratri. Garba is primarily done during Navratri and during weddings, otherwise it is not seen during the rest of the year.

Gheria is a type of garba that is done by adivasi (tribal) men. It was brought to Surat by men who came to work as domestic help in the city. They get dressed as women, and they dance with specific hair styles. The purpose of this practice is to give ashirvad (blessings). They are not transvestite men; they go



back to being “regular” men at the end of Navratri, and they do this out of devotion to Ambama.

Radio garba is a form that developed because of radio dissemination. There is no dance, only music and the sound of clapping hands. When the era of radio died out, Doordarshan TV began to broadcast garba, which led to the styles that are now known as “party garba.” I asked what leads to different styles of garba in different places; Naynaxiben thinks that it is primarily climate-related. In Ahmedabad, the climate is hot and dry, and there tends to be a lot more energy infused in the garba; whereas in Surat, the garba are much slower in nature. Surti garba is also particularly susceptible to Westernization; she thinks that since Surat is an industrial town, the individuals in Surat tend to embrace trends.

From her book, I gained more information about Naynaxiben herself. In Ajmer, she used to go to classical music programs. As a student, she got a chance to participate in garba and in speech competitions. After her wedding, she came to Surat, but did not participate in these kinds of activities for the first ten years after her move. She directed a *nrutya natika*, a play with many different kinds of dance, called *Parvati Parinay* (The Marriage of Parvati). In 1970, she started choreographing garba, as part of the work that she did for her school. One of the garba that she worked with featured thirteen ragas and five talas, composed by Nanalal, for which the local music teacher then composed the music.

As a result of a Dayaram garbo that Naynaxiben choreographed, she was invited to join Rashtriya Kalakendra in 1980. She used a specific prop that allowed the girls to ring a bell, like in a *mandir* (temple), as they were doing their



garbo. She had also utilized a composition of Rag Malkauns, which she had found in Mumbai.

At an economics conference for South Gujarat University, she choreographed lok geet and garba, which helped to promote her name and the name of Surat. In 1984, she was invited to choreograph garba from individuals in Russia, Bulgaria, and Finland. With thirty-five participants from Rashtriya Kalakendra, she also went to Canada to give performances through a program that she called “Lok Nartan Tali” (Peoples’ Dance Acclaim), which featured different kinds of Gujarati folk dances. One of Naynaxiben’s innovations was taking a garba in vilamgeet lay, where she had the individuals who were within the garba sing the garba themselves (previously, there was more of a call and response).

The effect of disco dandiya and plot garba created a sense of glamour and commercialization for garba. There was no sense of having to dance a certain way. Meanwhile, Doordarshan in Ahmedabad asked Naynaxiben to do garba programs for TV. In 1996, she put together a program called “Rag Utsav,” which featured different ragas, talas, surs (notes), and festival songs from which she created different kinds of garba, which audiences really responded well to. That program was performed in Surat for two years.

According to Naynaxiben, Navratri is a cultural and traditional practice that goes from generation to generation, which individuals are inspired to participate in from the pleasure that they derive from their participation. She explains that even individuals who are not participating cannot help but be swayed when a garba is being played. Shree Mahdhuv Ramanuj, a prominent



Gujarati singer, says that “From the depths of the heart, a continuous tala occurs with the beating of the heart within the body. Within the veins, each moment of life keeps moving. This is our life’s garba.”

Why is garba important? Naynaxiben says that to sing at each event is in the blood of a Gujarati woman. They sing every day – when they are swinging a baby, when they are bathing the baby, as they are playing with their child, as they are grinding flour and doing other household tasks, and even as they are sitting and standing. This instinct is so deeply entrenched that it is criss-crossed within the fabric of a woman’s life.

### ***The Nature of Classical Music Training***

In almost all of the conversations that I had about Gujarati music, Hindustani classical music was a prevalent part of our discussions. Classical music is an important basis for melodies in sugam sangeet, and it clearly permeates the world of folk music, as seen in the above section on garba, and its strong effect on other types of lok sangeet and on bhakti sangeet is seen in Chapter Four. For most middle class individuals, Hindustani classical music, as learned in a classroom setting, serves as the way that they learn about music outside of the home. Although most of the students that begin music lessons do not complete the full *visharad* course, which is equivalent to a Bachelor of Music degree, most do seem to gain satisfaction from developing some fluency in their musical abilities and having the opportunity to gain musical knowledge. In order





to understand more about this musical training, I observed three different classes at Jeevan Bharati School during almost the entire course of my fieldwork. The ethnographic material that I gained from this experience allowed me to understand how classical music and sugam sangeet are taught and learned, as well as to understand what are considered to be salient aspects of musical knowledge by middle class musicians. While the pedagogy of Hindustani classical music has been studied in other contexts, I found benefit in examining the localized practice of Hindustani classical music in Surat, which in itself is fairly broad; as explained by Michael Saffle, “Local history might provide ‘an interesting solution’ to some of the dilemmas facing scholars attempting to deal with enormous areas and variegated groups of people” (Saffle 2008, 294).

I first met with Sudhaben Patwardhan, the director of the Jeevan Bharati Music School in Nanpura, Surat, on October 3, 2009 in her flat. She has written her own standardized text for sastriya sangeet.<sup>22</sup> She believes that this standardization is important because it allows for any of the instructors who teach at the school to take over each other’s classes in case of absences, and it also assures that the students do not spend half of their class time copying texts. She mentions ideas to make a similar system for sugam sangeet, whereby students can also earn a diploma in this kind of music. Her plan is to have students meet in groups, follow a systematized curriculum, and gain a lot of their knowledge through the CD of recorded performances of the material from the standardized texts.

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<sup>22</sup> See Figure 3 of the Appendix



While Sudhaben is very interested in making sure that the standardization of music curriculum allows for her students to have the best music education possible, she realizes that it is important for the student is to be able to sing bhajans so they can perform for other people. A chota khyal (a short classical composition) does not have the same effect. I have a fair understanding of Hindustani classical music and the issues of teaching pedagogy, based on my master's thesis which examined the institutionalization of music practices within the diaspora in Washington DC. I found it fascinating to note that the same emphasis on performance also exists for music students here. That evening, I attended twenty minutes of Shilpaben's class, which consisted of sixth year music students. There were four students. They learned in a manner that was fairly similar to music lessons elsewhere. They went over the basic notes of the raga, the composition, and the *tans* (virtuosic run of notes presented in an interplay with the fixed portion of a composition).

The music school is situated at the site of the Jeevan Bharati Educational Schools complex, which houses a pre-primary school, a primary school (elementary school), a secondary school, and a senior secondary school (high school). The building of the pre-primary school is used as the music school site in the evenings and on Sunday. Dance is also taught at the same school. At the end of each school day, as children stream out of the school to waiting school bus rickshaws, which drive many students to and from school each day, and to waiting parents, the music students arrive.



Prior to the beginning of lessons, all of the students and teachers gather for a prayer. Then, they separate into classes. Classes taught include vocal (where proficiency in harmonium is also taught to more advanced level students) and tabla, where classical music is the primary focus. During my second visit to the school, I attended Purnaben's first and second year class. I introduced myself as knowing Sudhaben. I then explained that I am working towards a Ph.D. in music in Canada, where my research focuses on music in Gujarat, and I tell her that I would like to sit in the class, if it would be okay with her.

She begins the class by having the students sing a basic raga that they are familiar with, and then they review a *mukhra* ("refrain" of a classical music composition) and very basic tans. After it is over, she asks her students to define the term "*alap*" (unmetered section found at the beginning of a classical music performance). She then asks them how to identify the notes of the raga, how to identify the mukhra, how timing works out when singing the mukhra and in preparing for the singing of the tans, and how to work with the tans.

She then has them learn a Lakshman geet.<sup>23</sup> A recurring issue that occurred during the lessons was that students tend to break up their pronunciation. This also happened with Shilpaben's advanced class, which met later in the evening. She explained to her students that they need to understand how to phrase the words of the *geet* (song) to match the notes, so that the words will sound properly and be understood by the audience. I was surprised to find this

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<sup>23</sup> Lakshman is the brother of Rama, and he is a hero in the *Ramayana*, which is the great ancient epic of India that depicts ideal relationships.



issue occurring in a class in India, because working out pronunciations and the placement of syllables are pedagogical issues that consume a lot of teaching time in Hindustani classical music lessons in the diaspora. Part of the issue was a musical one; universally, singers tend to have to spend a great deal of time on diction. On the other hand, there were a large number of non-native Gujarati speakers taking lessons at Jeevan Bharati, who come from various places in India, so all of the students had very different approaches to language, which meant that syllables often sounded distorted upon the first singing.

At this point, interest shifted to me. I introduced myself with my academic background. Purnaben explained that first and second year students are kept together, so that the second years can get a review and a more solid foundation. She prefers to teach theory and practice together, by questioning her students on theory as they practice the concepts, so that they do not have to remember these concepts separately. She recommended that I attend her fourth year class, if I wanted to see more advanced students. There was then a discussion between ragas and notes; the gist of the conversation covered how different notes are prescribed for different ailments and for different times of day. She ended the lesson by explaining the significance of Omkarnath Thakore. The class included a middle aged woman; four girls around the ages of six, twelve, sixteen, and twenty; me; the tabla player; an older man; a young boy of approximately eight; and two forty year old women, both of whom took the teacher's blessings when the class ended.





The sugam sangeet class was a huge surprise for me. It was full of older individuals. The class was held in a room that was being used to dry dishes, so there was some issue about that, because water from the dishes was running across the floor that the students were sitting on. All students in all of the classes sit on the floor, as do most of the teachers; in some cases, they sit on a small stool and elevate their harmonium as well. There was also some apprehension over the fact that exams would be held on November 7. All of the students were adults. There was an older man (the same one from the first year class), a middle-aged man, a middle-aged woman, two older women, the same older woman from the first year class, and a younger woman who is also in Shilpaben's advanced class. They sang different songs to prepare for their exam.

Shilpaben's class went over Rag Bhairav. They sang the *aroha* (ascending notes of a raga), *avroha* (descending notes of a raga), and exercises. They then sang the composition, and finally they tried to sing their own tans. All of this was sung without accompaniment. There were three older teenaged girls and one man in this class. We discussed me and my work, which became a common exchange during the months that I was observing class(es); the students were always interested in knowing about my work, music education in North America, and myself. While teaching, Shilpaben made some movie song references to help the students understand the relationships between the notes in a raga through phrasing that they would already be familiar with by having listened to movie songs.

After approximately six weeks of observing classes, though there was break for Diwali in the middle of that time period, I was able to observe an exam.



The exam, which is created and administered from Nirmal and Vashi, was taken at the same time by students of all levels on Sunday morning. It is sent all over India on the same day. The exam is then collected and sent back to be graded. The practical portion of the exam requires teachers to serve as examiners for different schools. For example, Shilpaben will be testing in Baroda and Purnaben will be testing in Vallod. This happened during weekends at the end of November and the beginning of December.

The test was taken in the newer Jeevan Bharati academic building. Parents brought their children to the exam site for the 9 AM test. Most individuals had a chandlo,<sup>24</sup> signifying that they had prayed prior to the exam. Parents tended to greet the teachers and hover around the testing site (until they were sent away by the proctors).

I asked Shilpaben about the varied levels of the individuals in the class, particularly prompted by the “film-esque” gestures that I had seen in the fourth year class the day before. She answered that all of the students have varying degrees of talent and interest. What the students listen to when they are not in class definitely plays a major factor on how well they do – the students are given a CD with each level of book that they study (so they can hear the ragas outside of the lessons). The teachers try to do the best that they can with all of the students, especially to teach to each individual student’s capacity.

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<sup>24</sup> Chandlo is the Gujarati term for “bindi” (dot of color applied to the forehead to signify the sixth chakra).



I asked what the students do with the training that they receive. The younger students can go on to become music teachers in schools. Most of the older students are learning because they have an interest (and possibly more time in older age as a result of lessened familial obligations). One of the girls in Shilpaben's sixth year class, Mitali, has recorded a ghazal CD. For most of the other students, weddings and *bhajan mandalis* (a community of individuals that come together to sing bhajans) at temples are the main places where they will be able to perform music. When I asked Purnaben similar questions, she replied, "We do not create artists but good students."

I got a chance to see the alankar exam paper, which equates to years one through five of study. The questions consisted of working with a bandish which is a fixed composition that they have learned during the year (these exams are conducted twice each year), knowing similarities and differences between ragas, identifying characteristics between different *thaats* (organization and classification system for Hindustani classical music ragas), *thaat* identification, and short answer questions, which consisted of history-based questions, questions on basic Western music concepts, and writing a composition.

The following month, I interviewed Purnaben. She asked for the questions that I would ask her in advance of our meeting, so I provided with her a sheet of questions with my name and mobile phone number. Purnaben asked about my project, and I explained the different types of music that I was focusing on. We then talked about my musical background – a brief explanation of the degrees that I have.



She told me that she learned how to sing in a very different way from the teaching system that is being used at the music school. Her teacher taught the students to focus on one raga first, really learn to specialize in it, and then learn each of the following ragas with the same intensity (singing each one for at least one hour at a time). The visharad-level training requires for students to stay at the teacher's house for the week prior to examination. All of the ragas are sung for a couple of hours each, at the appropriate day and the appropriate time of day. In this way, the students are really prepared to work with the raga.

Purnaben thinks that this intensity of training is important for learning music because individuals will only care about how a person sings (not about the level of certification that they have). She finds the curriculum at Jeevan Bharati to be really different. With large group classes, it is impossible to give everyone individual attention. Also, when one raga is covered each week, it is difficult to gain mastery. She tries to have her students repeat singing over and over, so they really understand how each raga works, but there is only so much that she can do within the context of the music school format. However, she also states that the music school is a great achievement, and there have been some good students that have emerged from the school.

In January, I resumed attending the classes. In Purnaben's class, all of the students were singing one gat. "Bhajamana ni sha din a sham" had issues with tans, which led to the students making up some of their own tans to sing for practice. The students then discussed various theoretical concepts, such as the composition for Rag Durga and the characteristics of Yaman. They then





discussed the exam – apparently, the students will get a chance to sing what they want to for the exam. The teacher was trying to de-mystify the exam somewhat in order to encourage the students to take the springtime examination; although many students take the class, a lot of the older students, particularly the adults, are not enthusiastic about taking the exam because they do not think that they will pass. The students sang an old Bhimpalasi composition, and then they discussed Rupak taal.

As a result of it being the middle of winter, a lot of the adult students brought treats to their classes; it provided a break during the class, where everyone socialized as they ate treats, discussed recipes, and engaged in conversation. In the sugam sangeet class, one of the women brought salan pak, chajur pak, and taal laddoo. For the latest composition in the sugam sangeet class, the students sang the song together and then sang individually (being called on to carry the song in a cycle, so each student would have to sing a different part of the song). The teacher focused on “how” to sing a ghazal. She explained the words have to be lilted slightly and cannot all be sung in the same manner. She explained that in a ghazal “mahatva subda par che,” which means that the emphasis in a ghazal is on the words and not the swaras. Many of the individuals in the class seem to have been more accustomed to singing bhakti sangeet or patriotic songs. So, she explained that the rasa of a ghazal is different from that of bhakti sangeet, and the song also needs to be sung much softer than the manner in which a patriotic song would be sung.



After she explained this difference in genres, the teacher went back to trying to emphasize the importance of the words. She said that ghazal is about the words and the singer's job is to determine "subda no ucharan kevite karvano," which effects how the "bhav" (emotion) is expressed. There were two girls in the class who were in the sixth year of the sastriya sangeet course, so the teacher explained to them that there are differences between how the two types of music are sung. She said that the voice should remain open, but a bit more controlled when singing ghazal (i.e. the student should not project their voices like they would when singing classical music).

In Shilpaben's class, one of the students brought kichiu, along with plates and condiments to properly eat. The students spent some time eating their treat before they began to sing. The food was a nice chance to socialize; I found that particularly Shilpaben's class often engaged in personal conversations before and after class. Most of the students were teenagers who had presumably been taking classes together for several years, and Shilpaben is a very empathetic individual who understands that music is just one of the many endeavors that most of her students are engaged in.

During the class itself on that particular day, Shilpaben reminded them to open their mouths and breathe while they are singing. Most of the lesson was spent focusing on technique necessary to sing an alap properly; however, the class sang their alap as a group, which seemed to build confidence in each student's individual ability. At the end of class, Shilpaben told her students that they needed to start preparing to sing alaps on their own.



At Shilpaben's following class, I was told that there would be a program at Balaji Girls' School on February 2. The two students that would be singing at the program were Mitali, singing Rag Kamod, and another student that will be singing Rag Hamid. The students sang their compositions, working out technical aspects of the compositions. Examples of the different music elements that they worked on were how to reach up to NNS,<sup>25</sup> how to come back down in the raga, how to avoid tivra M (and, thereby, how to avoid transitioning into another raga), and how to move their tongue when singing *swaras* (notes) so the pitch sounds come out most clearly. The students learned how to identify Rag Jayjayvanti, and they discussed Rag Bageshri being a part of Kafi Thaata.

In the following class, all of the students practiced singing individual ragas. The student who was planning to sing Rag Hamid, on February 2, worked on making the mukhra comfortable (and finding "sam" every time it came around). The teacher recommended that she try gargling with salt water to clear her voice a bit, and she also told the girl to control her expressions a bit (which usually became rather contorted by her concentration while singing). Shilpaben recommended to her class that they purchase a CD, where approximately fifty ragas are being sung to allow them to have a different interpretation from what was being sung by each individual student. The teachers at the school were constantly trying to emphasize the importance of listening to their students.

In Purnaben's class at the beginning of February, the students sang in turns, making simple *alankars* (exercises that demonstrate vocal capabilities) for

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<sup>25</sup> S(a), R(e), G(a), M(a), P(a), D(ha), N(i)l correspond to the seven notes of the major scale.



Bhupali and Durga. They worked within three and four-note cycles. While singing these alankars, the teacher asked them what tala they were working with – she had them clap along to the tala to get a better sense of it before resuming to the alankars. At this point, the connection between how to work with notes and rhythm, at the same time, was still being made by all of the students. She then told the students that they should consider buying the CD of fifty ragas that is being sold. The students were asked what a thaata is, and they attempted to explain this to the teacher. The students then work with swaras and alankars of Rag Yaman.

From the class, I went to Balaji Girls' School for the music program, which included students from Jeevan Bharati and Balaji Girls' School.<sup>26</sup> The program resembled the annual program that I analyzed in my master's thesis, which was held at the home of Mr. Arun Bagal and allowed for amateur musicians to have a performance space, with the lead organizer in the case of this program being Sunil Mody, a locally well-known classical musician and promoter of classical music in Surat. The concert was emphasized as a place to allow music students to perform, and it was held to celebrate Sunil Mody's Guru's birthday.

The program began with two women, one was in her twenties and another in her forties, singing prathna and bhajans, accompanied on harmonium by another woman and a tabla player. Another woman in her forties continued with

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<sup>26</sup> Mitali's grandfather was always kind enough to provide me with transportation to and from the concerts that she participated in outside of Jeevan Bharati.





a rendition of Rag Madhuvanti. The Jeevan Bharati student singing Rag Hamid was introduced by name, as well as being in her sixth year of study at Jeevan Bharati and as working with Shilapben. It was her first performance, and Sunilbhai, who serves as the master of ceremonies, took the time to explain to the audience that this venue is a good chance for students to get used to performing on stage for fifteen to twenty minutes.

The program continued with a boy who was approximately ten years old, who played tabla as his tabla teacher plays a *lehra* (repeating melody that is played by the instrumentalist during a tabla solo) on the harmonium. At this point, Sunilbhai stated that his teacher used to say that for every day of practice that one misses, they fall back five days in their progress. The program continued with Mitali's singing Rag Kamod. She was very confident. The program continued with a slide guitar performance by a male in his twenties – I remember this being a popular instrument for individuals at the Balaji Girls' School music program during a previous visit when I observed a vocal class, sitar class, tabla class, and the guitar class. The program concluded with two experienced musicians, one of whom was Sunilbhai who sang a thumri in Rag Desh and a *vilambit* (the portion of the performance of a raga that is sung in a slow tempo).

The program was relatively informal. It was held in the second floor room/auditorium of the school. Chairs were placed around the perimeter for those who needed them, but most people sat on the floor. While the program started out with approximately forty attendees, the audience became nearly seventy people toward the middle of the program who remained until the end of the program.



## *Reflections on the Classical Music Training*

After having observed Hindustani classical music lessons and sugam sangeet lessons for many months, I held interviews with Sudhaben, the Director of the Music Program, and with Rekhaben, the sugam sangeet instructor. After having collected my own observations, I had many questions about the teaching and learning processes and the roles that it plays for the teachers and the students. I chose to interview the instructors, because I felt that they would be the most candid with me because of the collegial relationships that we had established after so many months of interacting with each other. I felt that these relationships would allow them to feel comfortable to give me the detailed information and insight that I hoped to gain from my interviews with them.

Sudhaben started studying music, as she said that many people do, because she was told that her voice was nice, and she completed her SSC exams and Bachelor of Arts degree in music. In 1951, she began singing on Akashvani Radio. For the first ten years after her marriage, she was not active in music because she was busy raising her children. In 1967, she joined Jeevan Bharati as a teacher. She herself learned about harmonium, composition, and about the genres of geet and garba after coming to Jeevan Bharati herself. Sudhaben stopped teaching privately when she began teaching at Jeevan Bharati. I asked her about the other teachers at Jeevan Bharati, and she said that a lot of them teach privately outside of the school. For some, the group class environment



offered at the music school is not an ideal learning situation, so it is better for them to take private lessons.

There are currently 400 students in Jeevan Bharati's music school. The students of music at Jeevan Bharati do immediately find work as teachers because of the reputation of the school. Sudhaben has noticed a significant increase in the number of students since television programs, such as SRGMP began. It awakened the public to the idea of pursuing a musical hobby seriously.

The sugam sangeet class has been taking place for the past two years. I asked Sudhaben why she began these classes; she said that the certificate program in Maharashtra for sugam sangeet has actually been in existence for the past forty years. One thing that particularly motivated Sudhaben is that in most sugam sangeet classes in Gujarat, she finds that students only learn how to sing in a group. The teacher will sing to them, and the students sing back in a group, but they do not get the opportunity to really improve their individual voices. Another motivation is for the students who begin their musical studies in their forties and fifties, so they can learn a repertoire that they can then sing publicly. They learn a wide range of songs in their repertoire. Sudhaben says that there are not a lot of performance opportunities in Surat, especially for the more advanced classical music students, so she tries to hold workshops to offer teaching opportunities for the students to perform publicly.

Most of her students begin their study of classical music recreationally, as an endeavor that they undertake for their own satisfaction and because it is "something good to do." Some people may have been complimented on their



voice, so that inspires them to begin their training. In other cases, it might be a matter of having seen television reality shows, such as SRGMP, that inspires one to begin singing. Rekhaben believes that these shows have especially had an impact on the older demographic of individuals that take her class, especially in the case of the older people that take her sugam sangeet class. She believes that a lot of her students take music lessons for the sake of relaxation.

I asked Rekhaben if she sees a different level of motivation between those who study classical music and sugam sangeet. She said that classical music study is exam-oriented. There is a certificate course in sugam sangeet too, so the class follows the syllabus which prescribes a certain type of songs to be learned. The syllabus and the exams come from Mumbai, and it is a seven year course, just like the classical music course. For example, lullabies, bhakti sangeet, and patriotic songs are among some of the different types of the songs that the students are supposed to learn, so they learn approximately four of each type of song. Ghazal and folk music, including garba, are included; however, Rekhaben says that most of the students are already well-acquainted with garba.

In her class, Rekhaben currently has students that are at different levels of the certificate program, from first year to fourth year. The syllabus that she follows determines how each level demonstrates proficiency; for example, first year students are expected to be able to sing three songs for their exam, whereas more songs would be required from a fourth year student.

Rekhaben began her own education in classical music as a young child. As she studied her classical music, she learned sugam sangeet by listening to the





radio. She has completed a master's degree in music, and she also has a teaching certificate. After marriage, she moved to Surat, met Sudhaben, and began teaching with her organization, although she already had her own private students before teaching at Jeevan Bharatri.

Rekhaben listens to a lot of different music from classical music to film music; she especially listens to the latter to remain up to date. She also listens to patriotic songs, because it is part of the curriculum that she teaches at the English-medium school where she is a music teacher; therefore, she teaches a wide variety of songs, including songs that are in English. She continues to practice classical music, as well as sugam sangeet in Marathi, which is her first language, and Gujarati, which she learned after moving to Gujarat after marriage. She believes that the more one listens, the better they can situate themselves within their own learning process.

I asked Rekhaben where these students might use the musical training that they get from her school. She explained that a lot of them find places to sing in their local settings, for example, older people might sing within senior citizen's groups. A lot of people might sing bhakti sangeet at their place of worship, and there is also a strong following of haveli sangeet in Surat. However, some of Rekhaben's students, especially the younger women, are also teachers themselves, so they take the class to learn new repertoire that they can teach in their own classrooms.

In sugam sangeet, expressing the feelings of the words are the most important thing; of course, it is important to sing in tune, Rekhaben says, but it is



the expression of the song that is the most important. Therefore, in class, she focuses more on the phrasing and the characteristics of the different kinds of songs that her students are learning. Her students are also given the *sargam* (the musical notation) of each song, so they can try to ensure that they are singing as precisely as possible during their practice at home. When I ask her how non-native Gujarati speakers work with the language aspect of the course, she explains that her students need to be proficient in both Gujarati and Hindi to take the course, so she finds that language is a topic that often needs to be discussed. Gujarati speakers often need clarification with Hindi vocabulary, and Hindi speakers often need clarification with Gujarati vocabulary.

### ***Creating a New Generation of Gujarati Musicians for the Current Audience***

During my time in Gujarat, I was able to meet a fairly new generation of Gujarati musicians who are working to develop a future for themselves in music, while being aware of the current audience that is very oriented toward pan(-North) Indian Bollywood sounds. These musicians are trying to negotiate the use of the Gujarati language with new sounds, while also considering the effect of Western music and globalization on Gujarat and its culture. I would like to highlight their stories to demonstrate the process through which current music-making occurs and how these musicians are influencing those around them through their own work and development. In this section of the chapter, I am



examining the stories of three individuals, who are making music in very different ways. The first example is of a couple in Vapi, Gujarat, who are currently working as music teachers and performers, the second is a young, Jain composer who is from Surat and studying in Mumbai, and the third is a sixteen year old student of Shilpaben's, Mitali, who aspires to possibly have a career in music and become a playback singer. I am particularly interested in the diverse range of possibilities available when making music within the index of classical music.

Vapi is a city that is situated mid-way between Surat and Mumbai. It is a major center for industry. I heard about Shyamal and Gargi Bhatt, who are music performers and educators based in Vapi, because of their performances in the diaspora.<sup>27</sup> Members of my family had heard Shyamal Bhatt in concert in the metropolitan Washington DC area, and they highly recommended that I talk to him about music-making because he was a dynamic performer, who is younger than most well-known Gujarati musicians. His performance style has been noted as being “very friendly in conversation,” because he enjoys interacting with his audience.

We began by talking about my project and having a general conversation about the genres that Bhatt works with. He has a recording studio that he works with that is situated in Anand, Gujarat. We discussed occurrences of Gujarati music in national mass media such as the film *Dil Chuke Sanam*, which features garba from Gujarat. Garba, and other folk songs such as music from Kutch, Gujarat is also modified for the sake of films. During the conversation, I noticed

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<sup>27</sup> See Figure 4 in the Appendix



that Bhatt is very aware of the full spectrum of music that Gujarati people are interested in, which includes many sounds and types of music that are not necessarily Gujarati; however an interest of Bhatt's is finding a place for Gujarati music within this spectrum.

The class that I observed was worked on vilambit, which is generally taught by Shyamal after the third year course because it is a bit harder to sing at the tempo required. The class that I observed was a relatively diverse group of individuals that included his own daughter, a girl from Rajasthan, a girl from South India, a middle-aged woman, and a younger man. During the lesson, Shyamal worked with the students to teach them how to pronounce and articulate ragas from the belly in order to denote the differences between the ragas that they are singing. He also taught general aspects of musicianship, such as how the tabla is tuned and which notes it is supposed to be tuned to. The girls sang through a vilambit, and he explained to them that it is easier to breathe through the faster rendition of a song. To have the luxury of singing slower, they must have good breathing control. Shyamal teaches them how to sing *akar* phrases (singing part of the raga without the notes of the words to the composition, using the vowel “aa” instead), which he outlined with his hand. As the students continued to repeat the notes, the teacher demonstrated how to elongate the actual words of the composition to fit the note sequences that they had learned.

The second portion of the lesson featured the teaching of Rag Bihass, which is from the Bhairav thaata. The students sang the aroha and the avroha, and then they learned an alap-like sequence. When learning the *sthai* (primary





musical theme in a fixed classical music composition) and the *antara* (second part in a fixed classical music composition that is sung in a higher register than the first part), the students were forced to sing individually and also to learn how to come in and out of individual lines (which will help greatly as the students mature their understanding of the raga and begin to learn tans). Timing problems tended to occur frequently, and Shyamal demonstrated visually how the tala was not being followed correctly. One of the adult students actually recorded the lesson on tape, and she had Bhatt wear a clip-on microphone that he sang directly into. After the basic composition was learned, they began to learn about variations on the *gat* (composition) that are possible.

In Vapi, a lot of the students that Bhatt teaches are non-Gujarati, and mostly non-locals, and there is also a very diverse age range of students. There are children and teenagers, young adults, and senior adults. In a discussion with Shyamal about his students, I proposed the idea that all of these students probably have different goals with their music educations; therefore, I asked Bhatt how he negotiates these differences. He said that he begins with a basic voice test to determine the student's ability and recommends a course of study accordingly. I asked Bhatt how he negotiates the repertoire that he teaches, considering the diversity of the students that he teaches. He explained that he tries to teach all of his students a solid classical music foundation; however, he also offers them the opportunity to learn a variety of songs between classical, bhajan, folk, ghazal, and even Hindi film songs.



In the afternoon, I was able to attend the large rehearsal that they held at a local school. A large number of students were at the rehearsal, and they were very enthusiastic about their upcoming performance. One of the most different things that I found about the musical environment in Vapi is that Shyamal and Gargi Bhatt are not alarmed about the need to preserve Gujarati music culture, although they themselves are Gujarati. Shyamal and Gargi are from Porbander and Jamnagar, respectively. They do, however, focus heavily on making their own compositions and on singing new, original Gujarati music that potential performers and listeners will find relatable and interesting. When one of the mothers suggested that the students sing a recent movie rendition of “Vande Mataram” for the upcoming performance, Bhatt replied that he did not want to repeat things that have come from movies. He did, however, keep one new movie song in the upcoming show, which was the song “Behti Hawa Sa Tha Woh,” from the hit Bollywood movie, 3 Idiots, for the keyboard class, and it was clearly the highlight of the program for many of the students.

My second example of an emerging Gujarati musician is Rishit Jhaveri, who is a young composer and who is completing his first year of a sound engineering course in Mumbai. The CD that he had composed at a young age was based on the Jain stavans, which are prayers that are written in devotion to the Jain Gods. The CD begins with a common prayer and then features these stavans. All of these stavans are “prachin”; they are approximately 300 – 400 years old. He composed the music based on his own feelings for the stavans, and his music is based on his classical training. Rishit took piano and harmonium classes for



seven years, though he stopped taking tests for Hindustani classical music levels after “madhyam.” He also passed Grade 1 on piano and Grade 3 on theory.

Rishit explains that he only composes music, and he needs lyrics in order to compose. He has done most of his work at Prism Studios. When I told him about my experiences at Mehulbhai’s studio and at Strings Studio in Surat, he explained to me that there are actually seven to ten music studios in Surat. I was relatively surprised with this number, especially since I had been hearing about the “lack of music culture” in Surat for months! He explained that most of the studios work with advertising, which makes a lot sense because Surat is a very industry-oriented town. There also have seemed to be a large number of people that create their own private recordings, for the sake of promoting music that they like, have created, or performed. This trend has been escalating since the popularity of SRGMP started approximately ten years ago. As he entered his teenage years, Rishit became more interested in sugam sangeet. He found more compositional freedom and really enjoyed composing melodies to words. Currently, Rishit composes in Gujarati and Hindi; the genres that he works with the most are bhakti, romantic, Arabic, and Sufi. He finds lyrics on the internet and then composes melodies.

He shows me his new material, which demonstrates his ability to work with a large range of genres. We begin with a prayer to the Goddess Saraswati, which features singers and tabla players from Surat. He has another song that works in a garba style, which bends pitches. Rishit has also composed a song that utilizes the same singers as Mehul Surti, and one can definitely see a similarity in



the sound. When I ask if this is a trend-related stylistic preference, Rishit states that it is merely a coincidence. There are two major singers that everyone records with in Surat. Other genres that are featured are funk, romantic songs, and electronic sounds. For South Gujarat University, Rishit composed the convocation song that is used to this day. He ended up doing this through an advertisement that was placed in the newspaper. Rishit has also composed for TV films; one of his songs for this medium was a Shiv Stuti.

The third musician who I followed was Mitali, who was sixteen years old during the year that I completed my fieldwork. On December 19, 2009, Mitali participated in the state-level youth talent competition. The competition was held at P.P. Savani School in Varacha, which is beyond the Surat Train Station. The area that the school is located in is quite modest, as are the school's facilities. There was a large outdoor stage area set up and a registration desk. The competition was to be held in the basement of one of the school buildings; however, the venue had to be changed because of the noise coming from the folk dances in the open stage area. The second location was slightly larger, but it was still lacking in good lighting. There were approximately thirty to forty individuals sitting in the audience, mostly parents and relatives who had come to see the participants perform. In Mitali's group, there were five participants, and she was the only female.

The first singer was a boy of about sixteen; he sang Bhimpalasi. His tabla player had intonation issues, which were fixed just before the gat section of the composition began. The second singer was also around the age of sixteen; he had





the most polished performance in the whole group. His skill was evident just from the first couple of notes that he sang. One of the smart things that this individual did was to sing a couple of notes of his *alap* into the microphone before he announced his *raga* and formally signified the beginning of his performance. The singing of the random notes allowed the performer to get a sense of the sound – there were no sound checks prior to the beginning of the competition. He sang in *Bhairav*, and the judges really appreciated his strong *alap*. His *tabla* also had to be tuned before the *gat*, and he had a particularly perceptive *tabla* player (who was able to observe the judges' likes and dislikes for tempos and adjust the singer accordingly).

The third singer was a boy of approximately fourteen years of age. His voice was not yet fully developed and in a state of transition, and he was not able to display much musicality with the *alap* (other than sing the notes). Because of the natural changes that were occurring to his voice, this singer seemed to be most comfortable in a five note range. The fourth singer started his performance by singing too loudly into the microphone, but he sang a relatively good rendition of *Todi*. There were some really good aspects to his performance, which were noted by the judges and he received second place. The fifth singer was Mitali. She had some problems during her *alap* section, and it was noticed by the judges. Her *chota khyal* (a composition that is sung at a fast tempo) was good, but it was not enough to compensate for her earlier mistakes. Overall, there were two groups of five performers. The winner of each group qualified to go on to the national competition, which was to be held in Orissa in January.



At the class that followed Mitali's competition, the students sang on their own. They worked on Rag Puryadhvanshi, and then sang through the book (for songs that they liked and had sung before). I was impressed by how focused they were to have time to practice, and how much they appreciated getting a chance to have feedback from each other. Shilpaben and I talked about Mitali's performance during the following class. We discussed how she had the most problems during the alap section, possibly caused by the fact that she did not relax before singing. Shilpaben said that it would have been better for her to have not listened to the other competitors and to have relaxed before her turn to sing. However, we both agreed that this was part of a process for Mitali as she continues her musical training and her ability to perform.

Hence, this chapter has dealt with how middle class individuals participate in the process of music making, particularly amateur musicians who take part in musical activities, such as garba and classical music lessons. Through their involvement with music, different kinds of musically-oriented identities develop for urban, middle class Gujaratis. Though the musics that I examined in this chapter were of varied aspects of the Gujarati music semiotics that I described in chapter one, as well as different genres, it becomes clear that these different elements begin to merge in the music-making process. Ultimately, the goal is to retain an interest in Gujarati music and music-making, while developing each of the genres that listeners identify with as being part of their regional culture. It is through this identification process that a musical-cultural agency develops for



individuals that use this regional voice to discuss the issues and the development of less dominant voices in the Gujarati middle class.



## Chapter Four – Regional Music and the Construction of Women's Voices

### *Voices of "Tradition": An Ethnographic Case Study of Three Women*

As I began my initial exploration into the musical cultures of Gujarat, I encountered many women for whom musical activities were an integral part of their lives. From the impromptu singing of bhajans, to group music lessons, to the singing of lullabies to children, the voices of these women permeated my experience of music in Gujarat. A lot of these songs were familiar to me, because they had been sung to me before by first generation, diasporic female friends and family members.

As a second generation diasporic, female Gujarati, returning to her homeland to begin preliminary research, it seemed natural to begin my investigation with these women; their songs linked my upbringing in the States to my homeland in Gujarat. Their songs had created a sonic space through which I could explore Gujarati culture, which I was socialized into through communal gatherings and cultural exchange full of nostalgia and memories.

These diasporic exchanges have affected the methodology through which I have approached my study of Gujarati music. I was raised by multiple generations of diasporic Indians. I heard stories and accounts that spanned from the time of my grandparents' childhood through my parents' early adulthood.





Therefore, my understanding of Gujarat spans a significant period of time, from the 1930s through the mid-1970s. The histories of the relative past and the present influenced each other as I constructed an image of my Gujarati homeland. As a result, I have utilized a multi-generational approach when investigating Gujarat, Gujaratis, and their music while conducting preliminary research, and the ethnographic data of this section will be presented through three different lenses: the lives of three different women whose lifetimes span three distinct generations.

Through the stories of these women, I aim to explore two questions. First, I wish to understand how musical training provides women with a sonic space in which they are able to exercise authority. Second, I want to investigate how personal ideologies are expressed through the musical repertoire that is selected and sung.

Before I present the case studies of these three individuals, I would like to begin with a definition of gender that is used by Cecilia Ridgeway and Shelley Correll in their article “Unpacking the Gender System: A Theoretical Perspective on Gender Beliefs and Social Relations.” They state,

gender is an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference. Like other multilevel systems of difference and inequality such as those based on race or class, gender involves cultural beliefs and distributions of resources at the macro level, patterns of behavior and organizational practices at the interactional level, and selves and identities at the individual level (Ridgeway and Correll 2004, 510 – 511).

For all of the women whose stories I investigated, I witnessed the effects of gender at each of these three levels; therefore, I have taken a multifaceted



approach to sharing their stories and the significance of music in their lives. I begin with the way that the women define themselves in the public sphere of cultural space and how this space affected their decisions to pursue music. I then study the effects of musical training on their interactional behavior, particularly with members of their family and their own self-identity. As generations progress during the lifetimes of each of these women, one might also witness how the effect of time on how the individual level and interactional levels of these individual life stories affect the macro level of gender beliefs for future generations. However, within this “institutionalization,” is a deeper complexity than a multilevel system, and I wish to extract some of these complexities before I present the stories of the women who I have studied.

First, I address my approach to the issue of gender, within public and private spheres, in the lives of these women. Gujarati society is a very gendered society in which males and females take on specific roles in the public and private spheres of their social, cultural, and familial lives. A public example of these differences can be seen through the Navratri celebrations that occur annually in Gujarati communities around the world. Garba, dances which are traditionally female, are danced by wives, mothers, and daughters, while their male counterparts who are present at these celebrations take care of young children and socialize with each other. When raas is to be played, women and men partner together, dancing to four and twelve-step patterns. As for the organization of these events, men often deal with the financial and logistical aspects of organizing these events, while women create an ambience through the setting up of pujas and



the preparation of food. There is an inequality in this situation, whereby individuals do not equally participate in all of the activities associated with preparing for the event; however, specific gender roles exist and are adhered to.

Analyzing ethnographic material in which relational gender interactions are constantly taking place, it has been important to me to scatter “gendered” information throughout my dissertation; however, delving into these issues further in this chapter has allowed for me to further analyze, and reflect, on so much of the “data” that I collected. While I personally interacted with women socially within public and private spaces, most of the information in my dissertation exists within public space, which I define for my ethnographic field as being the community of individuals, outside of the immediate family, with whom my informants socialize. With the awareness that most of my informants and I have and will continue to maintain close friendships through email and social media, and especially with the understanding that my informants and their acquaintances have the ability to read what I have written about them, I have done my utmost to maintain a strong boundary between the research relationships and personal friendships that my informants and I shared.

However, knowing my informants’ private lives has encouraged me to look for ways to analyze the music and information that they shared with me, while retaining the most essential elements of their public life stories that demonstrate each woman as a whole being. This representation was especially important to me because the differences in social behavior that lie at the public and private level occur in the lives of both men and women, and I did not want for



my scholarship to “cloak” my informants. Ironically, creating a distance between my subjects and I, and abandoning preconceptions about the best way to present ethnographic material was the best way to do this. In this chapter, as in the rest of my dissertation, I have tried do my best to allow my informants to “speak for themselves.”

When I began to reflect on this approach that I had taken, it was the work of Toril Moi, particularly her essay “What is a Woman? Sex, Gender, and the Body in Feminist Theory” (1999), that allowed me to find the voice to work with my ethnographic material. Moi’s work responds to major statements in feminist theory. First, she addresses the issue of biological determinism, which was undermined by the gender-based ideas of the 1960s that sex is biologically determined and gender is a social construction. Moi critiques this as being rigid. Moi states “the best defence against biological determinism is to deny that biology grounds or justifies social norms” (1999, 113). Moi also states that it is somewhat problematic to invoke nature because nature-based ideologies are “entrenched” in sexism and heterosexism.

Second, she responds to the post-structural idea, which critiques the gender and sex binary, that the relationship between sex and gender is arbitrary. Moi reviews the arguments made by post-structural feminists and finds them to be problematic, particularly because of the arbitrariness of the term “gender.” She recommends a return to Beauvoir who states, “Although our biology places certain limitations on culture, our specific cultural arrangements cannot be read off from our biology” (Moi 1999, 79). Moi believes that the notion of gender





needs to be removed or expanded; she suggests “body and subjectivity” as alternative terms to discuss “sex and gender”-related issues. Moi reaffirms Beauvoir’s statements that one has a choice in how they deal with the situation of the body. As a working example, Moi provides the statement “subjectivity stands in a contingent relationship to my body.” Essentially, Moi employs the fundamental statement of Beauvoir, which is, “A woman in her situation.” Hence, gender cannot be defined simply but as a study of the different situations that women face.

Finally, although caste and class have been discussed in passing earlier in the dissertation, it is important to note that caste-based traditions largely affect social identity, religious and cultural practices that denote life markers and religious holidays, and hereditarily-based occupations. Caste identification is hereditarily inherited. Within Gujarat, caste encompasses the four major categories, which are *Brahmin* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (traders), and *Shudras* (workmen). Within these four major categories are subcategories, called *jati*, which subdivide clans within the overall structure of the caste system. In conversations about social situations, I often found that class is discussed separately from the notion of caste, particularly since there has been greater economic mobility available to individuals since the economic reforms of 1991.

I begin with the story of a 93-year-old woman who was born and raised in Surat; however, she spent her adult life in Ahmedabad and East Africa. Her musical training and educational experiences were different from those of her siblings because they were raised by different members of their maternal family.



She learned prayers in school, from the age of five, and different poems and bhajans were part of her curriculum as she got older.

It was after her marriage, and her move to Ahmedabad, that she took a two year course in Hindustani vocal music from 1935 – 1937. When I had first met her, she had pointed out an individual in a photo of the Dandi Salt March and said, “He was my harmonium teacher.” When we discussed her music education further, I learned that this teacher whom she had identified was Pandit Khare, a student of Vishnu Digambar Palushkar. She studied sitar for a short while afterwards, but she did not continue her study of music after she moved to East Africa because she did not find good teachers.

When I asked her about the repertoire that she had learned, she told me that prayer books had changed since she was a child. She also told me that the Hindustani repertoire that she had learned could be examined through the books that she had studied through. However, it is through the effect of these music lessons that she revealed significant information. After her move to Africa, she worked as a Montessori school teacher, and she encouraged her children to pursue an education through school and through the study of the arts. She even offered schooling opportunities to female family members in India who were not pursuing an education there.

As she talked to me about her life and the lives of her children, I began to see her as a dynamic individual whose life was relatively transient at times and who thrived from taking part in the opportunities that life presented her with. While she inhabited the roles of a wife and a mother, she also lived in the space of



a woman whose education had provided her with a way to explore life's possibilities. She was somewhat unconventional for her time; her religious beliefs were relatively atheistic until later in her life. When I asked her about the music that was an important part of Gandhi's life – she spent her early adulthood in Ahmedabad near the Sabarmati Ashram – she told me that Raghupati Raghav was sung twice a day, no matter how late in the day it was, because Gandhi believed in this a lot.

When I continued our discussion of music to the genre of specifically Gujarati music, she told me that there was no music in Gujarat; music came after Indian Independence. She told me that one learned music differently during the time of the British raj, and it was Gandhi who influenced the change in the study of music in Gujarat. This aspect of my interview with her was particularly poignant. To take music lessons was a significant undertaking for a woman during the 1930s, and it is interesting to note that she took lessons with an instructor whose music was actively used in Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram.

The localized effect of the Gandhian movement was uniquely significant in Gujarat; one can see evidence of this through the changes in life patterns, gender roles, and musical performances that occurred during the time of Gandhi's work leading up to independence in India. A strong Gujarati women's voice solidified itself, and it was often heard through music. In "The Role of Women in the Peasant Movements of Gujarat: A Study in the Gandhian Phase 1915 – 1928," Shirin Mehta discusses how women's participation in the movement was "the culmination of a series of ideational and institutional developments that had



preceded the Gandhian era” (1990, 66). However, what is innovative about Gandhi’s work, as Mehta also points out, is his establishing a rapport between city and peasant women through speeches and through the bhajan mandalis that promoted both groups to come together. Having heard this, and seeing the impact of Gandhi’s work on an educated middle class woman whose pragmatic life showcases the agency that was available to women during the nationalism movement, I became curious as to how her experience would compare to that of other women, even those who were living a relatively conservative life in the present.

The other two women from whose lives I draw my ethnographic data are a mother, who is a high school teacher who will be retiring after the current school year, and her twenty year old daughter, who became recently engaged after completing her college education. My initial impression of these two women were of two modernized individuals, who are pursuing full-time careers and are cosmopolitan in their worldviews; compared to my first interviewee however, I still found them to be relatively conservative (and as compared to other middle class women from Surat). They live in an area of Surat that has developed significantly during the past fifteen years and has transformed itself from a village on the outskirts of the city to a thriving neighborhood within the city. The neighborhood itself features schools and houses that are relatively simple, compared to the flashy condominiums and apartment buildings that are being built alongside shopping malls with luxury stores elsewhere in the city.





Within my interviewees' household, I interacted with the mother, her husband, her daughter, and her son's family (as well as his wife, also a schoolteacher, and their young daughter). As I began to talk to them, I discovered that the daughter was well-educated not only in visual arts, her field of study in college and current career, but also in dance and in music. When I asked why she was getting married at such a young age, especially considering her wide range of interests and her apparent desire to continue pursuing them, the mother replied that individuals from within the community had been asking about the girl's marriage plans for some time. When a mutual family acquaintance suggested that she and the potential groom, a young male whom the daughter had met and been friends with while they had attended college together, would make a good match, the family decided that this individual and the opportunity for her to marry him were ideal. The family also told me that they had talked to the potential groom's family to make sure that the daughter would be able to complete her post-graduate education and continue developing her interests in dance and music after marriage. Shortly after I returned from India, the daughter had her official engagement ceremony, and she was also hired as a dance teacher at a local school.

As I initially heard this story, an internal dialogue between my informants and me began, which I had to negotiate with quickly in order to "clear my mind" and continue learning about my informants. In this situation, I drew upon memories of my diasporic upbringing of having been simultaneously raised in two cultures to remind myself that there is no "normal." When I returned to an academic setting, I encountered an essay by Ellen Koskoff, "Miriam Sings Her



Song: The Self and the Other in Anthropological Discourse” (1993), that allowed me to understand how I had deconstructed my experience. Koskoff provides a study of the two perspectives that are often taken in anthropological literature, which she describes as *descriptive* and *analytic* ethnography. She also studies the viewpoint of an insider, through diary entries written by her informant, and concludes with “a way to understand these perspectives, by introducing the dynamic of power that exists between the observer self and the observed Other.” The power relationships that Koskoff identifies are those that exist between the people being studied and the relationship between the ethnographer and the informant. She then uses the power relationship between the ethnographer and the informant to explain how very different scenes can be presented through each of the three ethnographic perspectives that are presented. Koskoff states that her goal is to call attention to “intentional and unintentional biases” and “suggest that we begin to integrate perspectives so what we may better portray the wholeness of cultures, both observed and lived, rather than remain content telling stories that are less about the Other than about ourselves.”

It was initially difficult for me, as an ethnographer, to see past the lives of my interviewees and my own. The mother is the same age as my own mother, and her daughter is the same age as my sister. I initially stereotyped both women as relatively static individuals, who lived within, what I believed to be, the constraints of Gujarati society with its gender roles and religious beliefs. However, as I began to interact with them, I discovered an agency that is deeply rooted in their Gujarati identities. While they do follow the norms of society, they



demonstrate how the norms of society are not static and the degree to which individuals can negotiate their own identities.

Because there was a young child in the room, it seemed natural to begin my questions to them by asking about the transmission of music from a mother to a child. The mother told me that women generally believe that if they sing lullabies to their children, their children will receive good teachings from the songs. She said that the name of God appears most of the songs that the mothers sing. In a poem that I learned from the mother, a child is learning about the changes that take place in nature as the day turns into night. The poem describes the ways in which nature transitions from morning to night; the reference to God is a natural part of this poem that explains why the Earth functions the way that it does. This poem is a part of the school curriculum; it appears in a reading book that would be used by a child in the fourth standard of a Hindi medium school. As I flipped through the book, I noticed that there was a natural transition from the songs that would be sung to a child by a mother in the home to the poems that would be read by the child in school.

When I asked about the music itself, citing the example of middle class music in Maharashtra to promote discussion, the mother told me that there was not as much music in Gujarat as there was in Maharashtra. She said that singing was not considered to be a good thing in Gujarat; however, there have been more instrumentalists than singers in Gujarat. As I continued to ask about vocal music in Gujarat, she explained that people sing bhajans, such as kirtans and prabhatias, because they are traditional. All of these types of songs are taught in schools, but



sugam sangeet is not really pursued. I was told that one will find poets, but they will not find singers; yet, there are singers that have now devoted themselves to singing only in Gujarati for the sake of promoting Gujarati music and language. It is interesting to note that the shift in focus that occurred in women's practice of music in Gujarat between the era of the first interviewee discussed in this paper, and the mother and daughter whose generations follow. The nationalist undertones of a Gujarati music culture have transformed themselves to a regionalized one.

For examples of this repertoire, the daughter sang some of the Gujarati songs that she had learned through her music lessons, including ghazals and qawwalis sung in Gujarati. She even sang a song about the internet. Through the diverse repertoire that she sang for me, I noticed a variety of messages being presented. She sang about religious events, nature, familial relationships, and even modern topics. The tones of the songs ranged from deeply religious and devotional to satirical.

I would like to describe two musical examples that I heard to demonstrate the range of the repertoire that the daughter sang for me. The first is a traditional Gujarati song about the rainfall that occurs during the month of Shravan. The words translate to, "The month of Shravan has brought lots of rain. The earth is covered with so much greenery; it is as if she is dressed in a green sari. The sound of the water droplets falling is as if the sky is dancing with anklets on her feet."





The second song is an innovative song about creating a website for God; however, a comical dialogue about whom to devote the website to and through whose words (possibilities sung about are Narsinh Metha, Kali Das, and Kabir). The words of the portion that I am presenting translate to the singer suggesting possible names for the website but not being sure what to call it. She then asks, “If we call the website Mirabai, will Radha become sad? And suppose, if Gopi feels left out, will her tears ruin the floppy disc (of my computer)?”)

As she sang, I realized that modernity was being communicated through the medium of song genres that are currently regarded as “traditional.” During the daughter’s performance, her brother’s young child was in the room and listening to the lyrics. The child is very imitative of her aunt; she tends to mimic a lot of her aunt’s mannerisms, gestures, and actions. As her aunt sang her satire about modernity and the internet, I wondered if this song would become a piece of the traditional repertoire that the niece would learn through the aunt.

### ***Singing as an Adult, Singing for “Samskar”***

During the classical musical music lessons that I observed, I was often told that adults who took lessons desired to improve their voices for the singing of bhakti sangeet and folk songs. Therefore, I continue my discussion of women’s music here with ethnographic accounts of women who sing bhakti sangeet and folk music in order to understand the process undertaken in singing this type of music and the function that it has in the lives of those who sing these genres. In



these two types of music, a lot of the critical focus is on the repertoire itself. I then conclude this chapter with the study of a ghazal recitation and of a prominent poet in Surat whose musical collaboration has come to embody a strong female voice.

To learn more about a specific kind of bhakti sangeet, called haveli sangeet, I met with Alka Choksi. She has been studying haveli sangeet for approximately ten years – since her son, who is now married and living in Los Angeles, passed twelfth grade. She used to enjoy singing a lot, so her mother suggested that she sing haveli sangeet instead of just singing film songs. She believes strongly in the importance of “samskar,” which has led her to the point that she is at today. There is a liturgy of several books from which the kirtans that are sung are derived. They are used to sing devotion to Thakureji (Krishna). There are several influential poets who composed kirtans, whose texts are believed to have come from within (through divine inspiration).

According to Choksi, kirtans are part of seva, part of retaining the culture, and they are based on classical ragas and talas. There are many different kinds of kirtans written for Krishna, which begin from the time of his birth and go on through the various parts of his life. They enjoy singing about Krishna because he lived as a human on Earth, but he was still a God. Therefore his stories, explains Choksi, as told through music are relatable to people.

She made a clear distinction between bhajans and kirtans. According to Choksi, bhajans are composed; however, kirtans come from within. Choksi’s group promotes the giving of concerts in Surat. They sing their kirtans very



traditionally; most commonly, the instrumentation is harmonium, bansuri, cymbals, rhythm – “no Casio.” Her group is looking to promote these songs to a new audience. Many people, according to Choksi, think that kirtans are boring; however, she believes that they are new and full of energy. They are sung in brajhasa, which she said is a higher language.

She sang to me a song about Yamuna in Bhairav and a song about Bal Krishna in Yaman. These songs are mostly sung by Vaishnavs. The performances are modified somewhat. Her guru takes older kirtans and speeds up the tempo and they also add traditional dances to the performances, which depict the lyrics of the kirtans. This makes the music more interesting for people to understand, and it serves as a means of cultural preservation. There are different songs for different festivals as well. All of the books from which the songs are derived come from Mumbai and they are based on classical music knowledge.

## ***Women’s Folk Songs***

Another type of music strongly associated with women is folk songs that are sung for various life events. I had been raised with some Gujarati folk songs being sung around me, and I became aware of the diversity in these songs from an early age. One of the most common types of conversations that I heard at get-togethers, such as baby showers and the events leading up to a wedding, were discussions comparing the similarities and differences of these songs in various traditions. At first, these differences seemed based on individual family



traditions; however, I began to realize that individuals with similar last names tended to share traditions. However, there can be wide variations. Caste, subcaste, and location all play into how traditions are enacted among different populations. The only book that I found on the music of southern Gujarat, as I searched for references, is a book called *Folksongs of South Gujarat* (1974) by Madhubhai Patel. The book is an excellent representation of the kinds of folk songs that can be found in southern Gujarat; however, it presents a somewhat stagnant interpretation of folk songs from the region, and I was surprised to find how dynamic folk traditions in this region can be.

I went to Valsad to meet with Iraben Desai, who sings folk songs that are predominantly sung between Valsad and Surat. She explained to me that the songs that she sings are those that her grandmother used to sing, which her mother then learned and passed on to her. Although Desai's repertoire contains music for almost every different type of life event, we discussed a few examples so I could get a sense of how and why Desai sings the repertoire that she does. The first genre that we discussed is *khaina*. Desai explained to me that these types of songs consist of couplets, and women sit across from each other singing different couplets to each other. The melody of the couplets is fairly simple and repetitive. The lyrics contain dialogue about different inter-personal relationships. For example, there is one kind of song that is sung about the daughter, the son-in-law (the daughter's husband), and his mother (the daughter's mother-in-law), another that is sung about sisters, and yet another that is sung as the daughter talks to her father about the kind of husband she wants.





She explained to me that from the time that girls are young, as young as three and five years old (although currently this fast is begun sometime during a girl's teenaged years), they would take on a fast whereby they would eat only one grain during one meal each day for five days. These songs would be sung while doing household chores, such as mixing and churning butter, on the porch swing, so that the girls would be distracted from their hunger as a result of the fast. This fast itself is called *alluna*, and it is an annual fast that is widely practiced throughout Gujarat although it has different names. A girl will make a commitment to complete this fasting ritual for a certain number of years; at the culmination, she will invite other single girls to her home to break the fast with her and to celebrate the ending of her fast. Traditionally, she will give gifts, such as a piece of kitchenware or a blouse piece, to these girls who participate in the breaking of the fast with her.

The subcontext of this religiously based fast was then explained to me. I brought a local informant from Surat with me when I visited with Iraben, and she said that the purpose of the fast is to teach a girl discipline. For example, a single girl, when hungry, might just casually go into the kitchen in her home and fix herself a snack to eat. However, this kind of freedom might not exist at her in-laws' home. Therefore, the purpose of fast is to teach the girl how to control herself. According to my informant, since this exercise in discipline would not be particularly appealing if it was explained by its functional value, the idea of having a religious subtext to the fast makes it far more appealing. Girls are told that they will meet their husband after they complete the number of annual fasts



that they have committed to, and all those who undertake this fast strongly believe that it will allow them to meet a good husband and have a good life.

Another type of folk music that we discussed is *hallerda*. Again, the melodies often consist of soothing couplets, sung with a soft voice that would encourage a young child to sleep. Nature is a frequent topic mentioned in these songs. Desai explains that elements of nature are also prevalent in *khaina*, wedding songs, and even *bhajans* as a way of respecting the nature that human beings are a part of.

A lot of these folk songs are not well-known anymore; therefore, Iraben's group is often called upon to sing at peoples' life events because they have preserved the repertoire.<sup>28</sup> They have written out most of the songs that they sing and have copied these pages amongst themselves. All of the women that Iraben sings with are relatives of hers who are approximately one generation younger than her and who are learning these songs through Iraben. One of the women in the group has taken Hindustani classical music lessons, and her sense of pitch affects how the rest of the group sings. Sometimes, the folk songs almost become transposed into a simple raga as a result of her presence.

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<sup>28</sup> I have attended some "mehendi and sangeet" (events where the bridal henna is applied and women come together to sing "traditional" songs) events in the diaspora where there are many songs that are started but few that are completed because all of the women that have gathered do not remember entire songs as a collective. However, in Gujarat, individuals in the community, such as Iraben, or professional musicians, such as Rasbihari and Hema Desai, might come together to sing songs that would "traditionally" be sung at the life marker that they are invited to share their music at. Recordings of such performances have also become very popular in Gujarat and within the diaspora as a means to provide repertory support.



The repertoire itself changes too. I talked to Bakulaben Ghasswala, Iraben's daughter, about these things. For example, she explained to me that as women's rituals, particularly relating to marriage, are changing as social practices change. Since a lot of the folk music discusses social interaction, the music changes as the interactions change. A colleague of Ghasswala's is from a community of fishermen, and he explained to me that as his people have changed their location, their folk music and traditions have changed. His people have adopted practices relating to Navratri and Holi<sup>29</sup> that were not part of their social and cultural rituals before.

The vocabulary used in discussions about women's music was very different from the language that I am familiar with when discussing these topics. I had often heard notions of "tradition" and "ritual" permeate the discussions of folk music that I had studied during my coursework as a master's and doctoral student; however, in Gujarat, the words that most often permeated the dialogue about this kind of musics were "practice" and "dialogue."

While Gujarati folk music is perceived as a tool used in ritual practices, it is also seen as being part of a social dialogue between women that occurs at different stages of life and at different times during the year. Based on my research, I saw folk music as a way to bring private dialogue into public spaces, especially in the case of mixed family gatherings. While the style of each song

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<sup>29</sup> Holi is a springtime festival that is celebrated by Hindus all over India but with some regional variations. In Gujarat, bonfires are lit in main squares, where prayers and offerings are made to celebrate the triumph of good over evil. Individuals will also throw colored powder at each other in celebration.



remains a constant, the names and nouns that are sung in these songs are based on specific situations.

### ***Women's Voices as Heard through a Ghazal Recitation***

I attended a ghazal recitation on October 2, 2009. The ghazal recitation was held in the space of, and hosted by, Akhil Hind Mahila Parishad. This organization consists of middle class and upper-middle class women, who meet to promote women's empowerment and to do social activities. My grandmother was a part of this organization and my great aunt served as a past president; therefore, I was aware of the social work that this organization has been involved in but had not heard about their cultural activities. Members of the Parishad have been taking ghazal classes from Ravindra Parekh, who is considered to be one of the foremost authorities on Gujarati ghazal in Surat, and this event was a culmination of the endeavour. A written publication with all of the ghazals was also made.

As I observed the recitation, I began to think of the work of Suzanne Cusick, particularly her article "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem" (1994). The article begins with the idea of decoding music theory through self-identification and uses the work of Joan Scott (who believes that gender metaphors are evident in all public and private discourse, and gender intersects with ungendered parts of life) to determine that feminist theory has to do with the negotiation between the performance of body and mind (based on the idea of gender performance from Judith Butler). Cusick states that a feminist





music theory “might consider the increasing modernist control of performance and, in a largely recorded music culture, the visual erasure of performance from the idea ‘music’ as a means of understanding the value of metaphorically feminine in our high culture.” Cusick believes that music theory would be the correct place to study these relationships because of its “tradition of theorizing about the phenomenon that is music” through the study of syntax and “structure of works’ text-like qualities.”

The primary reason why this idea of performance came immediately to mind is that the ghazals that I heard during the recitation were not set to music. Hence, the sounds of the ghazals did not contain any of the gendered metaphors that a musical composition may have contributed. Rather, each recitation adhered to a strict formula set forth by the genre itself.

Approximately thirteen people, both men and women, participated in the event by sharing ghazals that they themselves had written. There was a large audience of women from the organization in attendance, along with friends and family members of those who were reciting ghazals, and the students of Ravindra Parekh. A part of the recitation was a narrator, a well-versed poet, who provided an introduction to Surat’s literary culture and who also introduced the participants. The narrator provided context for the ghazals, based on his own knowledge after each recitation, and he provided the audience with further thoughts to consider. The mediation provided by the narrator often congratulated the audience on its ability to appreciate the ghazal recitation, and he also enforced the importance of ghazal as a part of Gujarati and Surti literary tradition.



The first recitation was about Gandhi and was recited in honor of his birthday. Following ghazals that were presented featured limerick and riddle-like considerations, whereby meanings were teased out by considering the relationship between two nouns. The event provided a good sense of how ghazal provides a means of expression for individuals. It was interesting to note that for some individuals, particularly the younger women, the event provided them a chance to be on stage in front of their family and to share their thoughts and feelings. There were some parodies of personal and interpersonal issues that would not ordinarily be discussed in a public forum; however, expressing it through the ghazal recitation allowed for the women to focus on the humor of their presentation. The audience was quite savvy and receptive toward the creativity being displayed.

Although I felt that I did not really understand the nuanced meanings of a lot of the ghazals that were recited, especially since I was very much of an outsider at this point during my fieldwork, I did begin to think differently about the ghazal as a genre. The experience also provided me with my first experience of hearing a woman's voice in a public space. All of these insights allowed me to feel prepared for the wealth of information that I was able to gain from my interview with Pragna Vashi.

The importance of ghazal as a literary and musical genre arose first during my discussions about sugam sangeet. Since the genre also appeared quite prevalently in the women's research that I did, particularly that of Akil Hind Mahila Parishad and in the music of Pragna Vashi, I had a conversation with Ravindra Parekh to gain more information about ghazal. Parekh taught the



members of Akil Hind Mahila Parishad during a shibir (an intensive period, or a “camp,” where individuals come together to learn) that he held for them. I asked Parekh, whose professional career was in a bank, how he learned about ghazal, and he explained that he received no special training but that he was largely self-taught. His home has an incredible library of books. As an author, Parekh’s first piece of writing was published in 1965.

In a ghazal, each individual couplet is a thought within itself. Parekh explained the concepts for ghazal composition came from Arabic and Persian language practices, then they passed on to Urdu and Hindi, as well as to Gujarati. I learned the very basic elements of ghazal composition from Parekh; although I have learned these basic concepts from how ghazals are composed in other languages, I wanted to hear of the composition process from an individual who writes ghazal in Gujarati. We began with the idea of a radif and a kafiya. He explains to me that the radif is a means through which to control the ghazal. He explained that rhyming elements of the ghazal are called the kafiya. A matla is a line where a radif and kafiya are repeated, and it is often the first sher, or couplet, or the ghazal. We also note the line where the author of the ghazal identifies him or herself. This is the basic structure of a ghazal, which usually consists of twelve or fourteen lines. There can be ghazals without radif, in which case the kafiya itself acts as the radif. Parekh stresses that ghazal is not a descriptive form of writing. In a ghazal, there is usually a turning point in the ghazal that is usually quite unexpected – according to Parekh, this point creates a sort of “spark” – and that creates the true meaning of the message that is being conveyed in the ghazal.



That turning point occurs when a secondary meaning of the kafia becomes revealed.

We discussed the topics of the ghazal, which is often a conversation between two individuals – one who loves and the beloved. In some cases, the beloved can be God but not necessarily. I asked Parekh how it is that ghazals come to be set to music. He said that ghazals are set to sugam sangeet. Usually, the composer picks up the mood of the ghazal to determine the kind of music to be used; for example, a traditional bhakti sangeet tune might be used for a ghazal that is written about God.

Muslim nawabs brought the ghazal with them during the time of their rule, which began during the time of the Mughals. When Muslims came, those who held darbar for the Muslims had to learn Urdu. In Gujarat, these individuals who held the darbars were usually Gujaratis. Over time, Urdu-speakers and Gujarat-speakers learned each other's languages, and they shared poetry with each other during this process. Surat is known as the Mecca of ghazal, because Gujarati ghazal originated from Surat. The Gujarati Ghazal Mandal in Rander did the first mushaira (a symposium where poets gather to recite their work) of Gujarati ghazal; Parekh estimates the first of these to have occurred in 1942.

### ***A Voice of Current Gujarati Women's Music***

After I met Mehul Surti, whose work I discuss in Chapter Two, I came into contact with Pragna Vashi approximately one month later. It is her lyrics that





are featured on the CD that I listened to when I first met with Mehul Surti, the composer from Surat who is leading the way toward modern Gujarati sugam sangeet. Vashi is a local high school Gujarati teacher, and her husband is a principal at the same school. They have two young adult daughters, both of whom are married.

When I asked her about the genres of music that are most commonly heard in Surat, she identified sugam sangeet, geet, lok, garba, ghazal, and garba. She showed me her work. The kids' songs that she has written are a book that she made when her daughter had a child. She then wrote a geet book, which is an interest of hers – she is quite interested in drama and garba. She also has three to four years of training in sastriya sangeet. She then started to write ghazals, which got put to music by Mehul Surti.

Ghazals used to be written to sastriya sangeet; however, they are more commonly being written to lok sangeet. Ghazal is something that the young people of Surat are also embracing; she teaches her students, who are in eighth through tenth grade and they enjoy creating their own poetry. When I ask Vashi how she became interested in ghazal, her husband jokingly answers, “I bothered her too much and she started writing about it.” We discussed how ghazal is a good way for individuals to express themselves, citing the example of the Akil Hind Mahila Parishad ghazal recitation. However, approximately eighty percent of the ghazals are not set to music. Surti composed the music to these ghazals to use different kinds of songs; kids are interested in Bollywood music because it encompasses a wide variety of sounds, therefore this style is attractive to them.



The CD was launched on June 6, 2009, through a concert that was held at Gandhi Smriti. The CD was also featured at [tahuko.com](http://tahuko.com) and [urmisagar.com](http://urmisagar.com). Akasvani Radio in Surat and World Space India (a radio station that is based in Mumbai) also featured the CD; the latter did an interview of Vashi and Surti. Although the music that is featured on the CD is essentially “popular music” or “light music,” it provides some of the most nuanced gender dialogue that I encountered during my fieldwork in Gujarat. Here, I would like to discuss the work of John Shepherd (1993), whose discussion on “difference” and “power” in music is particularly significant to me as a South Asian researcher who is studying current women’s music.

This essay is a study of “differences in which power is ambiguously implicated, differences having to do with class, age, ethnicity, and, most important, gender.” As a result of the attention that musicology has given to “difference,” Shepherd believes that musics and cultures are categorized according to those with power and influence. Furthermore, through the words of Joseph Kerman, Shepherd states that musicologists will attempt to map their own background and experience on those that they study, which I believe is something that occurs quite commonly in ethnomusicology with regards to insider and outsider research of Western and non-Western music cultures. The “thesis” of the article, however, according to Shepherd is that “it is impossible to understand the practice of music in modern Western societies without simultaneously exploring how the practice, understanding, and management of music have attracted a specific and powerful form of gendering.” In the case of Gujarati music, this



gendering occurred through the delineation of different genres and expectations placed on those genres, especially when those expectations remain far beyond social and cultural changes in society.

The section of the essay that focuses on gender and vision provide significant insights on how gender interacts with culture. Shepherd states that “modes of biological reproduction come to stand for modes of cultural reproduction.” In the continuing section, Shepherd discusses the paradox of music, particularly resulting from industrial capitalist societies, which is that music has been categorized as an unimportant mode of expression and that capitalist societies value certain types of music over others. In the case of Gujarat, I believe that this paradox arises most powerfully in the divisions that lie between national and regional culture, as well as “classical” and “folk” music. This is not to re-invoke a discussion on the “Great and Little,” but to recognize that the institutionalization of Hindustani classical music as a representation of national culture did much to affect how music is viewed in society. This “canonized” music did not have personal meaning for most of the people who listened to it, yet folk musics were far too diverse to appeal to all. Hence, the regional voice, which also represented the gendered voice and the voice of different classes, did not have a “space” in the urban setting until there was a “place” from which it could be disseminated.

Shepherd concludes that the control of classical music, as well as the “sanitization” of folk music, is an idealization of male culture and its attempt to control, whereas female discourse occurs within popular music (although this



discourse is still controlled by men). Therefore, with this background, I would like to discuss the CD that Vashi has produced, with the consideration of the meaning of the lyrics themselves but also the strategic placement of a range of genres in a collection of “women’s music.”

In an interview that I had with Vashi, several months after receiving the CD and having some time to listen to it, I asked her about the meaning of each of the songs, how she wrote them, and how she chose the words that she used in the songs. She explained that the songs in the CD represent the nine different parts of life, and their sentiments. However, beyond the basic form and melody, each song gives a sense of the interpersonal relationships that a woman experiences during her lifetime, often differentiating between the public and private aspects of the relationship within the song itself. When I shared the songs with individuals in the diaspora, it was quite well-received; one comment that I heard was “she talks about the things that I am thinking about.”

Prathna rasa, which is the sentiment of prayer, is the first song on the CD. The next song is a ghazal, which represents that idea that we go to work to achieve what we need to for the day. She explains that this ghazal represents a metaphor for life itself; we first have to decide what our goals are, though we do not know what we are going to encounter – a river, a valley, or hole; we just keep moving forward, without fear, to reach our life goal.

The next song is a geet rachna. In this song, Vashi describes how a single young woman begins to look for her life partner when she is sixteen years old, and she dreams of what this person will be like and a whole world of possibilities





is awoken in her thoughts. The unmarried, young woman dreams of what her life with her partner will be like. The song's most poignant and poetic verse beautifully describes the evolution of a young woman's thought process as she negotiates the difference between interacting with her life partner in her dreams and in reality; the song says, "If he comes to my door in real life, I will close the door, but if he comes in my dreams, how do I close the door? I am going to let him in."

The next song is a ghazal about interacting with the people in one's life. Vashi explains that we contact people on the phone and in person with careful thought and with a specific intention that motivates meeting. However, we need to go spontaneously to visit someone without any particular reason, or any selfishness, and just go to spend time with them. In this day in age, Vashi explains, it is possible for individuals to occupy their time with different activities that will keep them from interacting casually with other people. Vashi says that people should not do everything with care and planning; one should be able to do things without a reason. One can have so much fun by just going to visit a person spontaneously. And the conversations that occur during the visits are heart-to-heart, and they are from the very bottom of your heart because one wants to meet fully - "one hundred percent."

The next song discusses that there are two inevitable feelings that one will experience in life – prem (love) and nafrat (hate), and it is not easy to fully experience either one. Vashi describes how, in life, you are going to meet people who you really love upon meeting and sometimes you are going to meet people



who you really hate. They might have done something that you really do not like and you do not like them because of it. Therefore, this song attempts to express how there are some people that it is not easy to hate and there are people that it is not easy to love. This song discusses the complexity of those interpersonal relationships.

A lok geet, called *Dolariyo*, is the next song, and it attempts to capture the essence of festivals that used to occur within villages in olden days, especially the garba and the lok geet that were prevalent. As individuals have moved away from the villages, these kinds of festivals have decreased. However, Vashi still wants to keep the countryside alive, so that the connection between the city and the country can stay alive. So, Vashi explained to me that she has re-written this song in a way that this connection between people who now live in the city, the village, and these olden festival and the feelings that they evoked will not be forgotten.

*Dhire dhire gai pavan jevu* (Very slowly, (she) sings like the wind) is a duet that is featured on the CD. Vashi was given a piece of music on the sitar/guitar and was told to write a song on the melody. Therefore, she chose to center the entire song around one word, *dhire* (slowly). She wrote it in approximately twenty-five minutes, while sitting in the recording studio. It is about two lovers. The song describes the feelings of how love blossoms and provides meaning to everything in life that is experienced while being in love – “Without you, there is nothing in life. If you are close, everything is there. Everything that is around me, even if it is good, it is bad without you.”



The next song is a ghazal that expresses the sentiment of waiting for someone. Vashi explains that parting from someone and meeting them again is an inevitable part of life, and these experiences are often strongly felt. Vashi explains, “If you have lost touch with someone, you are waiting for them for many years.” This notion then transfers into the next song is about loss and finding, and the notion of being distanced from the house, and more specifically the sentiment that is created by the feeling of a home. Vashi explains that the idea of a “home” is not a small concept in this song on her CD; the home represents love, the aspects of life that one takes pride in, and the entirety of one’s lineage. She also explains that all of these accomplishments are not without great effort and sacrifice. Vashi clarifies the sentiment in the following way: “I sacrificed a lot by trying to get my achievements, but this house is what I have to show for what I have been through.”

The penultimate song is about giving a daughter away. Again, she brings up the notion of the home, and the idea being ready to embark from the home when one is ready to leave to embark on something new. Vashi says that as joyous as these sentiments can be, they are equally full of sadness. For example, if my daughter is leaving my home, I am happy that she is getting married and has found a good home, but I am sad that I am losing her from my home. Hence, this song holds the strong feelings of *such* (happiness) and *dukh* (sadness).

The final song is characterized by its lack of rhythmic meter, but it has a definite melody. This song is about a relationship that one has with her mother, and Vashi very gently describes that when her mother is gone, she feels like all of



the air has suddenly left her body and she can no longer breathe. Because of *Ba* (the grandmother), the entire family has been established, and an entire lineage of women has formed because of her guidance. The idea of a mother in this song, Vashi says, is not limited to just one's biological mother, but it is applied to all of the women in her family and even the Earth that she interacts with.

I asked Vashi why she has focused on the life of a woman in her CD. She explained that when she was younger and she was read to from the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, she reflected on the characters of Sita and Urmila and experiences that they had. She also considered how so many women in rural areas do not get education and the respect that they should be getting. Vashi continued by saying that even women in urban areas, who are literate and who are employed still do not get the respect and contentment that she should from life. Therefore, she felt that her writing should be focused on women and their stories. Therefore, she tries to tell the stories of women through her work, going back to the women that are in these epics that she used to read when she was younger.

One of the questions that she often focuses on is how a woman can attain a satisfactory life, in which she may be content. Each morning, Vashi says, she opens the newspaper to find at least seven to eight stories of negative issues or violence that have affected women in India. Vashi then says that she questions what is happening in the world, and she tries to communicate these issues. She gives me the example of a story that she read in the newspaper about a girl that was raped on her way to school, and Vashi immediately sat down to write a ghazal about the situation which was published in the newspaper on the following





day. The context for the ghazal is the idea that people believe that Narmad's Surat is believed to be the best city in Gujarat because of its literary sophistication, so her ghazal begins by asking how such an incident could occur in this Surat. Vashi explains to me that Narmad himself had worked for women's rights, and he himself was outcast for having married a widow.

I asked Vashi what the reaction to her ghazal was, and she told me that people always marvel about her ability to write about whatever she believes in. Especially when she writes about wrongdoings in society, Vashi says that her work is particularly well-received. I asked her how she decided how to express her work through music; she explained that ever since she was a young girl living in her village, she used to enjoy writing new pieces, particularly garba, for different occasions. For every occasion, she would write a new song.

When she moved to the city, Vashi met poets, learned different meters, and began writing to different meters. She also said that she had been praised on her voice, so she learned a bit of classical music and she also participated in drama. She became a rather accomplished writer, who worked with different genres and styles of writing. However, her passion for *sahitya* (literature) and *sangeet* (music) remained, and she considered the possibilities that would emerge if musical notes would highlight her written words. She explained that putting her words to music would give these words a new life. Whether or not individuals would sit to read all of the books that she published, many people would hear her music.



Within all of Gujarat, her CD has been very well-received. One of the things that she kept in mind when putting the CD together is that young children, mature adults, and young people should all be able to enjoy her work, so she include topical elements and musical styles that would appeal to a diverse audience. All of the singers have young voices and are well-known for having been successful on national television programs, such as SRGMP, and Vashi and Surti strongly considered whose voice would sound appropriate for each song. Additionally, Surti composed each song to anywhere from two to four different ragas, so Vashi would be able to hear the different variations and decide which one she best fit each song. It was also important to her and Surti to keep the sounds of each individual song as unique as possible.

Hence, Vashi and Surti have demonstrated cultural agency, or in the case of my ethnographic data, musical-cultural agency, which is a strategic tool that is constantly being negotiated as political, social, and economic changes have transformed the landscape of Gujarat and its musical preferences. Through the cultural agency developed through sugam sangeet, the performers and listeners of Gujarati sugam sangeet have been able to utilize regional music as a way to express the voices of less dominant individuals, as well as topics that have not been easily discussed among urban Gujaratis. Meanwhile, the sound of sugam sangeet has also modernized beyond the iconic nature of folk songs, which are strategically used in the music of Vashi and Surti, to the use of an index of popular music that acknowledges the globalized musical preferences of Gujarati music listeners.



## Chapter Five – Performing Music, Mediating Identity

In this dissertation, I have examined how a regional voice has emerged through middle class musical practices in the urban centers of Gujarat. By studying the primary genres from which sugam sangeet emerges, as well as the eclectic musical preferences of middle class individuals, I have observed that multiple notions of Gujarati identity have emerged, and they provide a cultural agency for individuals who have been able to use regional music to provide less dominant members of society with a voice during various points history. While a large part of the previous chapters have been focused on the development of sugam sangeet, as well as how sugam sangeet is perceived by its audience, in this concluding chapter I wish to focus on the process of mediation that occurs during a musical performance.

I wish to bring together the ideas of the previous chapters by focusing on how the different actors involved in the performance process construct the various identities that are mediated by performance itself. I have examined a range of performances of satriya and sugam sangeet, and each of these performances involved a unique process to establish and create a performance. Here, I wish to examine musical processes themselves to focus on the interaction between the multiplicity of actors involved in performing a musical event. From the process of creating a musical event, a unique identity emerges for each musical event that results from interactions between the music and how it is heard by listeners, as



well as the function that the music has for individual listeners based on their interaction with it.

### ***“Surotsav” and the Place of Hindustani Classical Music in Surat***

I would like to begin by examining an event that occurred for the first time in the city of Surat, as I was completing my fieldwork. The event was a three-night festival of classical music, held on the grounds of Chowpatty Garden at the beginning of April 2010, whose name, “Surotsav,” is a play on words. Finding the words “sur” (a musical pitch), Surat, and “utsav” (the Hindi word for “festival”) all within the title of the festival defines the very essence of the festival itself. According to Timothy R. Mahoney and Wendy J. Katz, “A regional identity...is a sense of belonging, an awareness of similar traits among people living under similar conditions, or not coincidentally, of how their cultural patterns are distinctive in comparison to other regions or places” (Mahoney and Katz 2008, xi). The development of Surotsav, undertaking, and reaction to Surotsav encompass the urban, Gujarati identity of Surat and its people.<sup>30</sup>

Although I heard about the planning of Surotsav prior to the event, and I also attended the festival myself, I had a conversation with the primary organizer of the festival, Vidur Nazar, after the event had concluded to reflect on the process of having organized it and its effect on the community, which provided

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<sup>30</sup> See Figures 5 and 6 in the Appendix





me with a chance to analyze my own observations and reactions to the insight that Nazar was able to provide. Nazar said the basic reason for holding the event was to honor the birthday of his father, which is on the first of April. For two years, Nazar had been considering holding a musical event to honor his father, who Nazar said had been involved in the “seva of sastriya sangeet” (in the service of Hindustani classical music) in Surat for over the last forty years. Many prominent “artists” (musicians) had stayed at their home and had given programs through the musical organization Swar Sangam, which Nazar’s father was the secretary of and through which he promoted music in Surat.

Therefore, after the fifteenth of January of 2010, Nazar contacted artists in Mumbai to inquire if they would be available for this event. The original concept had been to hold an event where audience members would purchase tickets; however, it was recommended to Nazar that he get in contact with the Surat Municipal Commissioner and the Surat Municipal Corporation became interested in becoming part of the event. They offered to assist with the organization and costs associated with the venue, stage decoration, light decoration, sound, and advertising. The remuneration of the artists, travel expenses, accommodations, and hospitality was paid for by funds that Nazar himself raised from music supporters in Surat.

Based on past experiences, those who had organized and/or attended classical music events in Surat guessed that there would not be more than 400 – 600 people in attendance at the concerts. However, Nazar received a good response from individuals in Surat, and from many of the surrounding cities, in



anticipation of the event. After the concert, Nazar learned that audience members even came from as far as Vadodara. Within Surat itself, Nazar went to all of the music schools in Surat to encourage individuals to attend and to assure that all music students and individuals involved with music, particularly Hindustani classical music, knew about the event. He was particularly enthusiastic that they would be able to offer admission to the event free of charge because of the involvement of the Surat Municipal Corporation.

The audience attendance at the festival was phenomenal. On the first day of the festival, which featured the renowned Hindustani classical violinist N. Rajam and her family, the seating capacity had been planned for 1,800 seats, yet the concert ended with “standing room only.” On the second day, the seating capacity was increased to 2,100 – 2,200 available seats, and the final night concluded with 2,600 – 2,700 available seats because the previous night had also become very crowded. However, there were over 3,000 audience members in attendance on the third, and final, night of the festival. I attended the festival, and the seating was rather creative and greatly contributed to the ambience of the festival. There were three seating areas, a central seating area and two seating areas on either side. The two sides contained chairs placed in rows; however, the central area was rows of elevated platforms that were beautifully decorated with festive cloths and pillows to create the feeling of a “traditional” and intimate Hindustani classical music concert experience.

When I asked Nazar about the response that he received when the festival ended, he said that he began receiving thirty to forty phone calls each day after the



festival ended, and this continued for approximately five to six days after the conclusion of the festival. All of the phone calls were individuals within Surat who had attended the festival and were calling to congratulate Nazar on the success of the event. When I asked what kind of feedback he had received, Nazar responded that he had begun to get the advice that he should arrange the festival in a way that it could occur each year and for many years, and he especially heard this from all of the people that he talked to when the festival had ended. There was a strong desire in Surat to see this music festival become an annual event, and many individuals also offered their assistance and support to help with the event.

I asked Nazar about the observation that I had made that classical music concerts in the past were mostly organized by music societies, such as Saptashree and Swar Sangam, and the audiences of these concerts would be limited to the members of these societies. Nazar explained that individuals who were members of these societies paid an annual membership fee, which would be used toward the organization of three to four concerts each year that were open for members to attend. The membership fees were very modest, because the general understanding was that the public had little interest in Hindustani classical music based on the response that the societies would receive. Therefore, the societies remained rather small, and they were not able invite the most accomplished musicians to perform at their concerts, which led to the continuation of the societies and the memberships remaining small.

I suggested that this situation might now change after the success of Surotsav. Nazar responded that it does seem that this will be the case, and he has



begun to learn that the societies are beginning to notice an increasing interest in Hindustani classical music since the festival. The goal of having five hundred to six hundred members might be realized, he said, because after having attended this event, individuals are beginning to consider the importance of supporting organizations that might be able to hold more concerts such as Surotsav.

It is interesting to consider the importance that having a “place” had on the success of these concerts. Throughout my ethnographic study of urban Gujarati music, I have demonstrated that Hindustani classical music holds an important space in the urban music setting as an index of regional music. Despite this space that the music occupied, it has always been believed by music connoisseurs that there is not a deep interest in Hindustani classical music amongst the general audiences of Surat. However, by presenting these concerts in a space that is uniquely Surti, Nazar gave the genre a social and musical place of importance for Surti audiences.

Up to this point, I had heard a lot about these music societies, but I had not been able to understand the origins of these organizations. Since Nazar is the second generation in his family to be so actively involved in the promotion of Hindustani classical music, I decided to ask about the history, and the role, of the music society through his family story. I began by asking why these organizations began, specifically wanting to know what the historical need for a music society was. Swar Sangam began in 1951. During that time, Nazar’s family had been living in Mumbai. However, when they came to Surat in 1958, Nazar’s father was invited to join Swar Sangam because he had been involved in





The Santa Cruz Music Circle, which still exists today. He became the secretary of Swar Sangam because of his interest, his work in Mumbai, his desire to continue this work in Surat, and his connections to musicians that he had already established through his prior work.

I asked Nazar what the value of making these societies was, and he responded that the idea of holding a “ticket show” did not really exist; in other words, the practice of organizing a concert that individuals would come to hear of, purchase tickets for, and attend was not prevalent. Therefore, the only way that musical concerts or programs would be held is if 200 – 300 individuals would come together to fund the planning and hosting of a concert, which is why such organizations began.

Hindustani classical music has become rather popular for students, as seen in the examination of the classical music scene in Chapter Three. I believe that the success of this event demonstrates the significance of a major cultural shift that has occurred in Surat during the past several years. Based on the ethnographic data that I have collected, and the conversations that I had with those involved with classical, I believe that this shift is the role of media, rather than institutions, now supporting the popularity of Hindustani classical music among urban, middle class people. The effect of televised music programs, such as SRGMP, making classical music relatable to the broad spectrum of people that can be defined a middle class, and more importantly as a potential audience for classical music, has built a larger, more informed audience that is keen to attend concerts that reflect the style through which they enjoy consuming music.



However, I also believe that it is the regional flavor of the performance that sustained an interest in the event. The style of the performances themselves, as situated through a festival, with emphasis on creating a special and unique atmosphere through which Surtis could enjoy Hindustani classical music appealed greatly to the potential audience. Bringing the “concert stage” to a well-liked local setting mediated the performance’s identity by making the space relatable. Therefore, the process of meeting in that space initiated a dialogue between the performers and the audience, and place itself served as an important mediator.



## *Mediation during Sugam Sangeet Concerts*

The first sugam sangeet concert that I was able to attend was of Ashit and Hema Desai on February 7, 2010. The concert was held in an outdoor amphitheater on the grounds of a garden in Borivali, which is a suburb of Mumbai. The audience sat on the ground and was mostly middle class and upper-middle class Gujaratis living in Mumbai. The most interesting part of this concert for me was watching the audience. They interacted quite easily with the music and would begin to sing songs with the singers from the first line that they recognized. During the poetry and stories that were told between songs, members of the audience would respond in appreciate by saying, “wah!” When Hema Desai began to sing “Madi Taru Kanku,” nearly the entire audience was singing the words with her. Ashit Desai followed with a song where the audience could actually participate.

This was interspersed with a complex ghazal that had a poignant social story about a young boy and a beggar preceding it; in the story, the boy and the beggar interact with each other and each one goes back to their respective home to report that they met “God” today. With the emotions of the story already having saturated the minds of the audience, Ashit Desai’s ghazal rendition was very well-received. The following day, I attended a sugam sangeet class, where Hema Desai was teaching approximately ten to fifteen women. During the class, she explained to her students that learning how to express the musicality of the song that they were singing begins to be understood after they have learned the song



itself. Similarly, I believe that the audiences of sugam sangeet understand the nuances of the ghazals that they listen to after they have gained some context from the poet narrator.

I attended the concert of Purshottam Upadhyay on March 2, 2010, which was held at Gandhi Smruti in Nanpura, because of invitations from one of my initial informants, whose husband is a member of the board of Saptashree, which is the Surti organization that hosted the concert. Invitation was for members only. Members seemed to range between the ages of over forty to senior citizens, the latter of which were a little over half of the crowd. The age demographic might be attributed to the age of the performer himself, as well as the fact that the tenth and twelfth standard board examinations had just begun on the day of the concert. These are the same examinations that caused a noticeable shift in the number of people attending music lessons at Jeevan Bharati – the teacher who instructs sixth year students had actually cancelled her classes for the week because her own son was taking these exams (and many of her students would be occupied with them as well).

The concert was supposed to begin at 9 PM. Arriving at 8:30 PM, my great aunt and I were the first two people there. The doors to the auditorium did not open until 9 PM, and the concert did not begin until 9:30 PM. There was a bit of a mad rush to get to seats. It appeared that individuals from this society know each other relatively well, and they tend to hold seats for each other. When I asked why the concerts begin so late, I was told that the workday often does not end early for most of the business people in Surat, who tend to work until 8 PM.





Therefore, concert times have to be accommodated for this audience. An interesting note was that some individuals sent their servants to hold seats for them; the servants then called the people that they were employed by shortly before the concert began, so these individuals could take their seats and enjoy the concert.

There were some formal introductions on behalf of the committees' members. Upadhyay introduced his own stage crew of approximately ten people, including his rhythm specialist, his two daughters, the other star of the evening – Hansa Dave, the narrator, and the keyboardist. Upadhyay began by singing two songs. There was a narrator at these concerts as well, who served as a master of ceremonies and an interpreter of songs. Because Upadhyay celebrated his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday recently, he was in the mood to interact with the audience and narrated his own commentary in addition to what the narrator had to say.

He continued with another song of his own, two songs sung by his daughters (who were very syncopated in their singing and their actions – the women were very good singers and they have mimicked the theatrical presentation style of their father), another male singer, a song from a female singer, a ghazal from Upadhyay himself (during which he provided commentary in the midst of the ghazal itself – making his performance partially resemble a recitation and partially resemble a song), and two songs with Hansa Dave, which featured more “traditional”-style folk (and which included one garba).

I was surprised to find the commentary behind this concert to be a bit more relaxed and less formal than that of Ashit and Hema Desai's concert. The



commentary had to do with a lot of Hindu and Muslim dialogue (and a preaching for universal tolerance), the story of the child and the beggar (which I heard at the Desais' concert), gender (a comparison of Aishwarya Rai and Mother Theresa), and dialogues about marriage (which seem to be a particular crowd pleaser). Upadhyay's own commentary dealt with a lot of his thankfulness to the crowd for having supported his career for so many years, as well as interesting recollections of peoples' reactions to his songs. I was surprised to hear him recount the story of an Ismaili woman; he recounted her reaction to one his songs, accurately mimicking her unique accent. It occurred to me that Upadhyay's songs must be important to all contingents of the diaspora as a way milieu of cultural dialogue and commentary.

The instrumentation was interesting, because Purshottam accompanied himself on the harmonium. His keyboardist stuck to relatively "traditional" sounding accompaniment toward the beginning of the concert, which mimicked Indian instruments. During the pieces of the younger performers, he began to integrate some harmony. He took the most liberty with the ghazals, where he utilized different sounds and textures to highlight the words that were being sung by Upadhyay. The intermission was around midnight, and we left at this point. After the concert, I realized that the more that I listen to Gujarati music being performed live, the more I notice that it is culturally contextualized and specific to the demographic that it is being performed to.



## *A Conversation with a Mediator*

After having attended some Gujarati music concerts and having seen the importance of poets and “announcers,” – individuals who narrated during sugam sangeet concerts and who continued to fascinate me – I decided to have another conversation about the role of literature in Gujarati music as a mediator identity with a well-known Surti poet and announcer named Mukul Choksi, who actually had aided me by providing me with the contact information of some of my informants in Ahmedabad and who I finally met in-person during Surtosav. I met with Choksi for a brief conversation at his clinic; he is a psychiatrist and sexologist by profession. The clinic was rather modern-looking, and I observed the small rooms that served as a waiting area for me and that probably served as a consultation space for Choksi’s clients. They were glass-walled, though the glass was only clear at the top and at the bottom, so an individual could not be recognized when sitting or standing in the room. However, the rooms were quite pleasant, with light streaming in and the ability to see other peoples’ feet, one did not feel cloistered.

When Choksi was ready to meet with me, his assistant brought me to his office, where he had incidentally been finishing up a media interview. Choksi is often featured in the local and national papers because of his musical involvement, as well as because of his professional expertise in psychiatry and sexology. Being one of the last interviews that I conducted in India, I marveled at the range of professional occupations that all of my informants have. As teachers,



college professors, doctors, and homemakers, as well as professional musicians with extensive teaching studios and interaction with Gujarati society, there is something to be said about lived experience that these individuals bring to the music that they create. Through their professions, my informants are actively part of the society for which they create music. Therefore, they were able to serve as informants, but also as instigators of critical dialogue as they asked insightful questions about me, my work, and how I was processing the material that I received from them. In this ethnographic project, I was always very aware of my own role as a mediator, largely because of the savvy of my informants. However, they also helped me to construct a complete idea of Gujarati music by always making sure that I had talked to the contacts that they thought would be important for me. For example, during my final conversation with Mehul Surti, he reminded me that I needed to talk to Mukul Choksi to get a deeper understanding of the lyrics that go into sugam sangeet.

Hence, I began my interview by asking about his role as a poet and as an announcer, citing that I first heard about his work in a book that talks about the music of Soli Kapadia who uses Choksi's poetry as his lyrics. Choksi explained that in the case of music, a composer will often just select his poem to compose a song to, and his poetry is utilized in that way. In the case of a play or a film, Choksi will be given a theme upon which to write. In the case of film music, the process might be completely reversed from the one that he described for music, which is that he will receive a composition and be told the right words that go along with the music. He believes that this is the hardest, because he says that the





word choice becomes limited and one becomes tied to the composition itself. However, if the poet writes a poem first, the composer then gets tied to the words: so, whoever writes their portion has the greatest *mukti* (freedom), and the individual who follows has less freedom in the creative process.

Approximately ninety five percent of the time, Choksi explained to me, the poem is the first part of the process in the Gujarati sugam sangeet that is currently being created. Then, well-known composers will browse a selection of poetry, and they choose a poem to compose to. However, Choksi has written poems on a great number of themes. I asked him to give me an example of these themes, and he replied that he writes for a great number of occasions. For example, when there was a flood<sup>31</sup> in Surat in 2006, there was great property loss and suffering. Two days after the flood, Choksi said that people were greatly depressed, they were calculating their losses, and the entire city was “mentally down.” He and Mehul Surti thought to do something to elevate the mood of the city. Therefore, Choksi wrote a poem, Surti composed to it, a singer sang the song, and it was videographed. The song was called “Chalo Fari Pacha Hasta Thai Jaiye” (Come On, Let Us Start Smiling Again). Choksi says it was a simple song, written for “simple people,” and it became very popular. For approximately fifteen to twenty days, it was sung by everyone. At the one year anniversary of

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<sup>31</sup> Incidentally, this flood greatly affected a lot of the music resources in the city, particularly those that had been housed at Narmad Library. The effect of the flood could still be seen three years later when I began my fieldwork, especially in the area in Surat where I resided (Parle Point); there were red markers showing how high the flood waters had gone in different areas.



the flood, they released another song that was called “Juuo Fari Hasta Thai Gaya” (Look, Now We Are Smiling Again).

In addition, he has worked on a lot of school songs. Choksi explained to me that each school in Surat has its own song. Surat Municipal Corporation has schools for underprivileged and low socio-economic children that are free of charge, so he worked on the entrance song for them. Another example is the anthem that Choksi wrote for The Sarvajanik Education Society, which is one hundred years old. He also prepared a song for a conference on menopausal women – the likes of which he does not believe has been composed before. The song was part of a presentation on fitness after the age of forty, and a group of women actually came together to do a dance to raise awareness on this issue at the conference.

One interesting song that Choksi noted to me is a song that he and Surti created that has the message of “Happy New Year.” Choksi explains that there are songs for New Year’s, but all of them are in English and there was nothing to be found that expresses this message in Gujarati, so they composed one, which is a fascinating way to take a “cosmopolitan” holiday that is commonly celebrated and create a uniquely regional identity for it. In contrast, Choksi also wrote for a song warning about the dangers of electricity poles for those who work with them. He said that he tried to take elements of the lives of people who would be around this electricity, and incorporate those elements into the song, so individuals from the target audience would be able to understand the song.



As Choksi thought of the other songs that he has written, to try to give me a sense of the kind of work that he does and the kinds of audiences that he writes for, he told me about a three-hour long song that he has collaborated on that includes all of the different aspects of Surat. The purpose of this endeavor is to promote the city of Surat. He goes back to plays and films and says that he has written a great many songs for these endeavors, focusing on love and patriotic topics.

In searching for another unique subject that he has written a song for, he recalls a song that he had written for AIDS awareness. The words for this song said, “Tane prem to karu chu, pan uu AIDS thi daru chu (Though I do love you, I am afraid of AIDS).” He explained that this song is especially important during Navratri, when a lot of youth participate in the festivities and socialize, and a lot of parents tend to be afraid of the possible consequences of this socializing and the results, especially AIDS. So, the song was actually composed as a garbo. This song took to FM radio, and a short media message (MMS) was made that was then messaged to hundreds of young people. Choksi received a lot of good feedback from this endeavor.

There was another song that was prepared on the topic of exams. Choksi explained that during exams there is a lot of stress and a significant occurrence of suicide that results from students not being able to deal with the pressure. In order to motivate young children, and to help them to face their exams without fear, Choksi wrote a song. This song was also well-received. Therefore, many songs that have been written deal with current social issues in society. Ironically,



Choksi explained that a lot of the audiences for these songs do not necessarily know a lot about sugam sangeet, nor would they be considered to be listeners of the genre, but they like these songs and they listen to them.

In addition to these projects, and aside from his usual work in sugam sangeet, Choksi stated that he is attempting to help instigate trends in popular music in Gujarati. When I asked for an example, Choksi provides that of having written songs for a “ring ceremony.”<sup>32</sup> During the ceremony, there are usually 100 – 200 people in attendance. Choksi wrote a song for this ceremony, and the actions of the ring ceremony are artistically choreographed into song itself; hence, the entire event has been set to music. Another example that he cites is the fact that there is no “Happy Birthday” song for Gujarati people, which he states that most individuals in Gujarat will have sung for them at least a few times during their life. He questions why there is no Gujarati song for Gujaratis to sing during a birthday celebration. Therefore, he proposed a new song that is as “lyrical, lucid, and with as much emotional appeal” as the English song that is sung for birthday celebrations. He does admit that it will be “a tough job” to compose a new song that can achieve that much; however, he believes that it will be an achievement for Gujarati sugam sangeet if individuals end up singing a Gujarati birthday song instead of the English “Happy Birthday” song.

I concluded our interview by asking Choksi about his role as an announcer during sugam sangeet concerts. He explained that he does not do particularly

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<sup>32</sup> A ring ceremony is part of the engagement ceremony where the bride-to-be and the groom-to-be exchange rings with each other. This is a relatively new tradition.





serious announcements when he does participate in sugam sangeet concerts in this way, because he finds that audience members are not able to follow him. Choksi says that strong followers of sugam sangeet will follow a complex narration; however, it is the common listeners of sugam sangeet that need context through poems, anecdotes, and humorous material to connect them to the music that is sung and performed on the platform. This is not to say that Choksi does not want complex songs to be written, because he himself really appreciates the more complex Gujarati songs that have been written from sophisticated poetry. However, he strongly believes that it is very important to write songs for those who do not understand this poetry, and this is the goal of his work.

### ***Reflecting On Myself as a Mediator of Identity***

At the end of my time in India for field work, one of my informants suggested that I give an interview with a newspaper, and even possibly on TV and radio, because people in Surat would be interested in knowing my story. Having had so many people share their stories with me to contribute to my dissertation research, I thought that talking to a newspaper reporter would be a good way for me to share my story in return. Therefore, an article called “Gujarati Music is Not Just Garba” was published in Divya Bhaskar newspaper’s Surat edition on Monday, April 19, 2010. This is a widely read newspaper in Gujarat and within its diasporic populations, and each major Gujarati city has its own edition of the paper that is published.



The sub-heading recognizes me as “*Garavi Gujarat* (a pride of Gujarat).” and it describes me as a non-resident Gujarati from Washington D.C. who is completing a Ph.D. at the University of Alberta in Canada for the purpose of studying Gujarati music. The sub-heading near my photograph identifies me as proudly sharing the music of Gujarat, despite my foreign residence, and a caption near my photograph states that I have taken the challenge of making Gujarati music popular in the United States. The photograph, which was taken by a newspaper photographer, is of me, sitting next to a statue of Krishna playing the flute, as I describe my research to the newspaper reporter.

The article quotes me as stating, “In the United States, people commonly believe that Gujarati music is mostly garba and some folk songs. I want to change this belief, because after having come to Surat, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, and other cities to study, I am sure that major changes are coming to Gujarati music.” It goes on to describe that I am studying “urban” Gujarati music. The article identifies me as a non-resident Gujarati whose parents live in Washington D.C. It identifies my mother as Divya (Thakkar) Dhokai, who is originally from Surat, and who works as a medical technologist. The article also identifies my father, Satish Dhokai, as an engineer. The article states that after a bachelor’s degree in the study of violin from George Mason University, I went to the University of Alberta to earn a master’s degree in ethnomusicology.

The article says that I state that I did extensive study of Indian, Arabic, and other types of music during my study of ethnomusicology before I decided to pursue my Ph.D. research in Gujarati music. For this purpose, the article states



that I earned a Fulbright-Nehru scholarship from the governments of the U.S. and India. For approximately the past one year, after having studied an extensive variety of music in Surat, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Vapi, Valsad, and many other cities, the article states that I believe that there are many new practices emerging in the field of Gujarati music. The article quotes me as having said, “If we talk about just Surat, then Mehul Surti’s tunes are singing to the beat of a new era of music. Dr. Mukul Choksi’s compositions are the kind that young people are able to sing along to; an example would be the song that he wrote about the flood in Surat. There are many such examples.”

The article then questions if the people of the United States would be interested in this kind of music. The article states my response to this question as the following: “The most important part of music is the tune of the music itself. These days, Sufi music is very popular in the United States.” The article then continues to quote me as saying, “Because of garba, Americans know what Gujarati music is. In addition to that, I would like to have them understand that there is a lot in the scope of Gujarati music in addition to garba.”

The morning that the article was read by its world-wide Gujarati audience, many phone calls were received at the home that I was living at in Surat and at my home in the United States. My own placement as a Gujarati, who is interested in promoting Gujarati music, is a highlight of the article, and a lot of readers identified me through my parents. Although I discussed a large amount of the research that I had done during my time in Gujarat with the reporter, it is interesting how he began his article with the presumption of garba being one of



the sole aspects of Gujarati music, and then described my view of Gujarati music as being dynamic and relevant. It ends with an optimistic note, indicating that the melody of music is what people are attracted to (such as in Sufi music), and that there is much to the scope of Gujarati music.

### ***Concluding Thoughts of a Reflexive Nature***

The interview that I had with the reporter of the Divya Bhaskar newspaper article that was written about me was rather extensive – we discussed my background, Surat, the goal of my work, and the different musics and places that I encountered during my fieldwork, as well as my impressions of all of them. It was interesting to me to observe which aspects of our conversation were highlighted in the newspaper article. As the article reveals, aspects of Gujarati music that one can easily identify with, and relate to, allow for music makers and listeners to find a purpose and function for Gujarati music in their cosmopolitan, urban soundscape. Another important part of identifying with Gujarati music culture for urban Gujaratis is to understand new practices that are emerging in the music. The angle of the article captures the approach that I took to my research.

I initially studied how musical identity is created through urban Gujarati music sounds by focusing on the sounds themselves – particularly folk and Hindustani classical music influences, interspersed with the symbolic significance of the Gujarati language being used in the lyrics of urban Gujarati musical genres. This led to my considering the function of music in the life of the urban Gujarati





individual and the purpose of a regional music in a pan-(North) Indian soundscape. However, I realized that an important area for examination exists between the identity construction within Gujarati music and the agency derived through a regional, Gujarati voice; this area is the response of the listeners to the music and how the music develops meaning for them. I believe that this is a crucial element in the study of urban Gujarati music, because the interactions that occur in the social space that is created by music greatly influence how the music is heard by listeners. An example of this in my fieldwork is the effect of Surotsav on Gujarati audience reactions to classical music, which continues to grow according to a Surti informant of mine who recently emailed about classical music reception in Surat.

I believe that my dissertation contributes an approach that is not often taken in field of ethnomusicology. When I first began to explore the idea of urban Gujarati music, I did not select a particular genre. I focused on what audiences in Gujarat listen to, which is when I began to notice how different genres of music intersect in how they are produced and consumed by Gujaratis. From that observation, I became interested in the intersection of genres to understand how music itself is a social situation, as opposed to a genre-based delegator of the individuals that produce and participate in musical practices. In this social situation, individuals, through their own musical and social identities, demonstrate their agency at multiple levels based on how they interact with the different identities enacted through music. This work provides a study that begins with the listeners to understand how audiences influence music-making. This is a



particularly important approach to the further study of ethnomusicology, especially as the study of mediated musics continues to develop. In many types of mediated musics, the vantage points of performer and listener quickly become blurred as they rapidly interact with each other through the Internet to create a musical experience. These kinds of social interactions have existed prior to the era of technologically mediated music, and it is important to situate the communicative aspect of mediated music studies accordingly.

Within South Asian studies specifically, my work contributes to a post-Independence dialogue on regionalism. While this topic has been, and still is at the forefront of domestic life in India, the cultural effects of regionalism are an area that need be further developed by music scholars. The nationalized music practices from the time of the Independence movement have experienced a complex evolution, which has resulted in the current music culture in Gujarat and in other regions in India. I believe that the study of these musical developments in the decades following Independence, particularly with a focus on regional differences, will lead to much more thorough understanding of current music culture.

This dissertation represents the beginning of the relationships that I made in the field as I explored music as a social situation. Since I was studying middle class music culture, which is a relatively broad area musically but quite precisely defined through the identity-based focus on my inquiry of Gujarati music culture, it took some time to build relationships with my informants, as well as an understanding of how music truly functions in their lives. Most of my informants



do not consider themselves to be commercially involved in music as a profession, and many of these individuals have careers and responsibilities outside of their music-making. Therefore, I entered a world where relationships were often somewhat oblique at first, but where identity and agency were always very meaningfully displayed and communicated and where some of the most critical dialogue about music in Gujarat came to me from the musicians themselves. My informants always encouraged me to see the field for what it was, not what it could be theorized to be, and they generated lucid dialogue based on musical and social intersections. As an ethnographic piece, I believe that my work encourages the participation of informed informants to effect the ethnographic process by discussing the general ethnographic questions I had begun with, the materials that I had gathered in the field, and the connections that I was beginning to make while still in the field.

As I was compiling the research that I have gathered into the academic exercise of a doctoral dissertation, I questioned how much of the “music” and how much of the “people” I wanted to include in this writing. The intersections between the “music” and the “people” were always the most fascinating parts of my research on a personal and a scholarly level, and I always found myself writing about them. However, as an ethnomusicologist, I questioned the degree to which I was obligated to study the music as an insular object. As I was searching for the answers to how to formulate my own work, I decided to continue to uncover the socially and culturally-based regional dialogue that has taken place at musical sites in urban Gujarati areas. The more questions that I asked, the more



interconnectedness I found between seemingly non-related genres. This has resulted in a mosaic-like piece of writing in which the reader and I explore the musics of the urban, middle class together and use semiotic tools and social observations to determine a regional identity.

As I was concluding my dissertation, I re-encountered these words in Douglas Haynes's preface to his own dissertation work on Surat,

Stubbornly I kept taking notes, hoping that somehow I could salvage a dissertation from this seemingly chaotic collection of material...the initial conclusion of course was overly simple, since it deprived the subjects of my research of any creative role in shaping their history. The opinions elites in Surat expressed in their politics, ultimately leading to assertive calls for national independence, were often not the views that British administrators would have liked them to have. As I attuned myself more and more to their rhetoric and their ritual, I came to recognize that these individuals may have operated within the confines of language adopted from their rulers, but they did so to accomplish ends that were largely their own and they constantly reinterpreted the meanings of the concepts they employed (Haynes 1991, ix).

Having read these words, I felt vindicated in the approach that I have taken to examine the musical culture of the descendants of Haynes's work. Like in the case of Haynes's work, my informants were well-spoken in a Western-educated vocabulary and in the understanding of global music cultures; however their understanding of music, particularly of their own regional voice, was far more sophisticated than the brief explanations that they initially gave me when I was not astute enough to understand their unique vantage points. Taking the time to truly understand the multiplicity of voices that answered me as I asked questions about Gujarati music, and examining the meaning of these answers in relation to each other, is how I approached finding the meaning of urban Gujarati





music culture. These individuals, and how they continue to make music, are of the utmost importance to me as I continue the research that I began during the year of my fieldwork, and which continues as I finish writing and begin to plan my next project.

The areas that I have been unable to study include the purpose and function of “traditional” musics derived from caste and family-based tradition. While many musical traditions have been changed over time, and many are no longer practiced, it would be helpful to understand how they have changed to understand what factors cause music to evolve in Gujarati society to further determine social and cultural values associated with music. I plan to place these questions at the forefront of my next study to develop depth to the work that I have begun with this dissertation.

Since I “left” India in April 2010, “the field” has remained in fairly close contact. Through sharing of media files and social networking sites, such as Facebook and YouTube, my informants have continued to share their ideas, their music, and their ongoing interest in my work as a music researcher. From emails exchanged with older informants to casual Facebook chats with younger informants, the musicians that I researched continue to build relationships with me past the work that I did during field research, which they considered to be the introduction of our acquaintance as fellow musicians and as friends. Our mediated exchanges continue to lead to a differentiated approach to the nuanced processes through which Gujarati music culture affects their urban soundscapes.



Therefore, I look forward to returning to Gujarat to examine how the stories of the individuals and the musics that I have studied continue to change and evolve.



## Glossary

akar – singing part of the raga without the notes of the words to the composition. using the vowel “aa” instead

Akashvani Radio – All-India Radio

alankar(s) – exercise(s) that demonstrate vocal capabilities

alap – unmetered section found at the beginning of a classical music performance

antara – second part in a fixed classical music composition that is sung in a higher register than the first part

aroha – ascending notes of a raga

arvachin garba – “modern” garba that are written on poetry after the time of Dayaram and that are based on Hindustani classical music ragas

avroha – descending notes of a raga

bhajan – Hindu devotional song

bhajan mandala – a community of individuals that come together to sing bhajans

bhakti sangeet – religious devotional music

bhangra – popularized music based on music from the region of Punjab

bhavai – folk theater performances

chania choli – clothing traditionally worn by girls and women during Navratri

chota khyal – a composition that is sung at a fast tempo

dandiya – sticks that are used during the dancing of raas

desh bhakti sangeet – patriotic songs

desh dharma – (patriotic) duty toward one’s country

dhol – drum

garba – folk musics and dances that are traditionally performed during the nine-day festival Navratri



garbo – a clay pot that is used in worship during Navratri

gat – composition

geet – song

gharana – a “house” or “family” of musicians who share musical ideology and practices that are passed from teacher to student

ghazal – a poetic form consisting of couplets

hallerda – lullabies

haveli sangeet – genre of worship music that is sung for the Lord Krishna

Karnatic – one of two genres of Indian classical music that originates from South India

kaviya sangeet – literally translates to poetic music; though it used to be a different genre from sugam sangeet, the two terms are now interchangeable

khaina – songs sung by unmarried girls while sitting on a swing and churning butter

lehra – repeating melody that is played by the instrumentalist during a tabla solo

lok geet – folk song

lok sangeet – folk music

manjira – finger cymbals

mukhra – “refrain” of a classical music composition

Navratri – a nine-day festival that worships Ambama, who is also known as the Goddess Durga or Kali in other parts of India

prachin garba – “traditional” garba that are based on poetry prior to the time of Dayaram, that are part of an oral tradition, and that become known as “lok geet”

prathna – prayers





raas – folk dances and musics that originate from Vrindavan (to depict scenes of Lord Krishna and Radha) and from Western India as devotional dances to the Goddess Durga that are popular during Navratri

raga – a series of five or more musical notes that create a framework for a Hindustani music composition

rastriya geet – patriotic songs

rastriya kirtan – a type of Hindu religious music that includes nationalist stories and songs from multiple genres

sargam – musical notation

sastriya sangeet – Hindustani classical music

sherri garba – neighborhood garba

sloka – song-like religious verse

sthai – primary musical theme in a fixed classical music composition

stridharma – the duties of women

sugam sangeet – essentially translates to music that is likeable and that is also known as light classical music

swaras – notes

tala/taal – a rhythmic pattern

tan(s) – virtuostic run(s) of notes presented in an interplay with the fixed portion of a composition

thaat – organization and classification system for Hindustani classical music ragas

vilambit – the portion of the performance of a raga that is sung in a slow tempo

visharad – a course in Hindustani classical music that is similar to a Bachelor of Music degree



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\*Individuals who remained anonymous are not included in this list.



Appendix

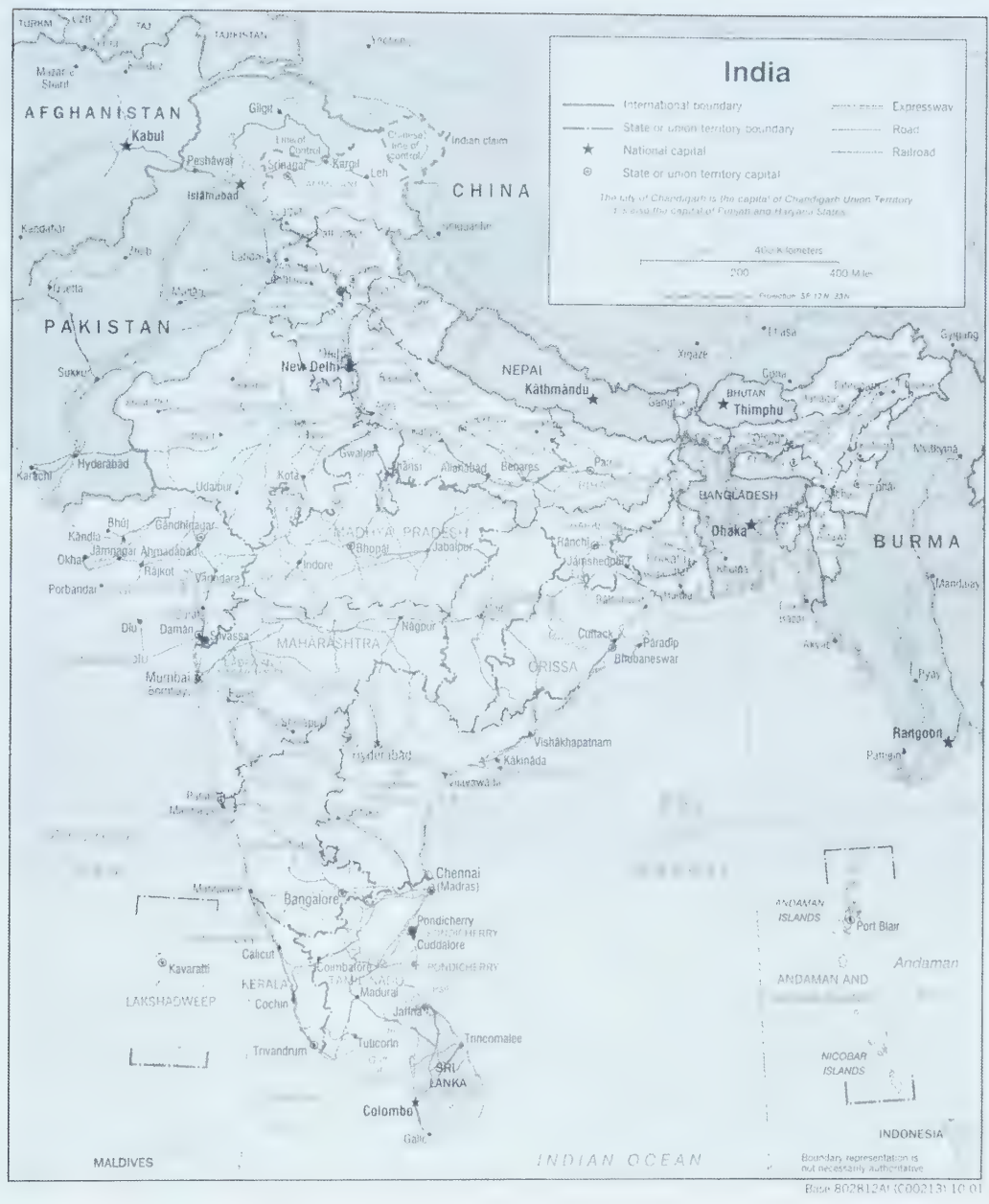


Figure 1

Map of India

Produced in 2001 by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and obtained from University of Texas Libraries



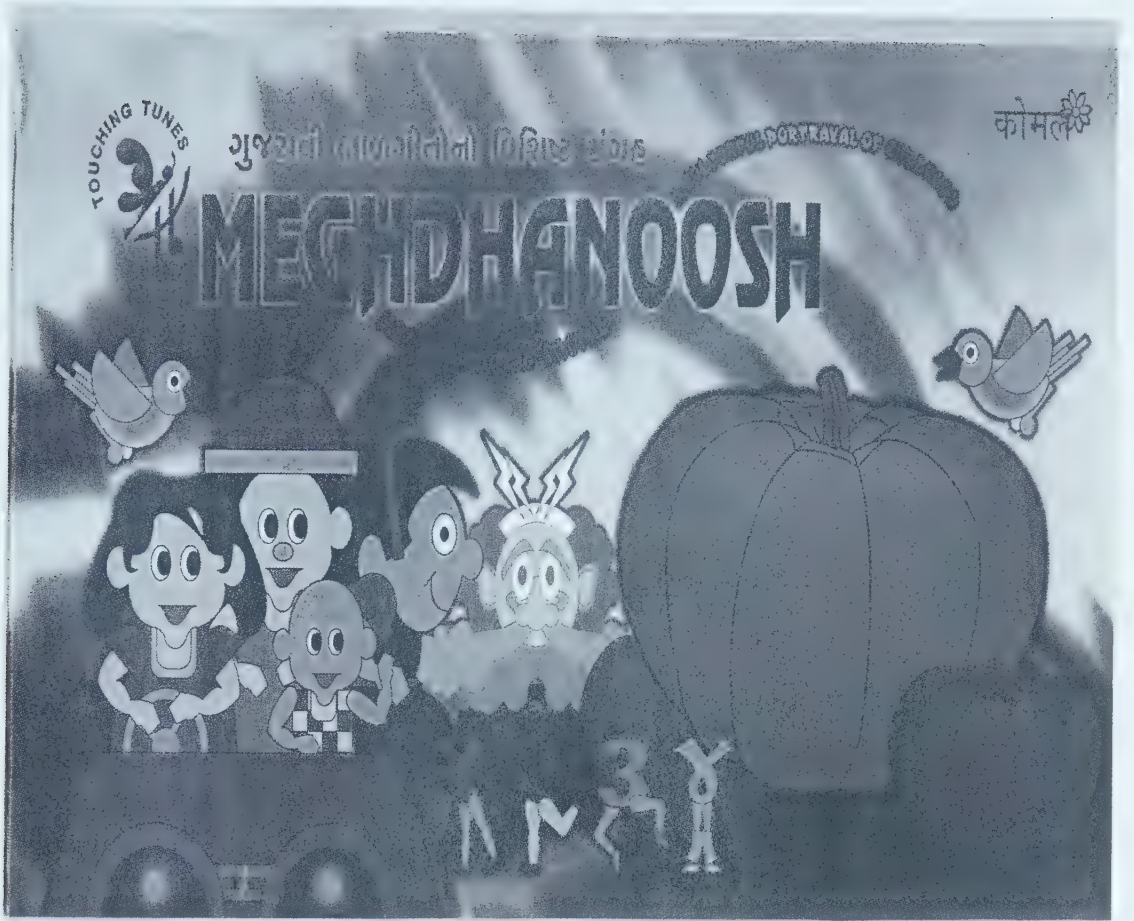


Figure 2

This is the cover for Shyamal and Saumil Munshi’s “Komal” CD called *Meghdhanoosh (Rainbow)* [mentioned in text on page 72]



# સંગીત પ્રવેશ

શ્રી ગણેશાય નમઃ

(અખિલ ભારતીય આદ્યર્થ મહાવિદ્યાલય મંડલ, મુબઈના નવેમ્બર ૨૦૦૬ના અભ્યાસ ક્રમ પ્રમાણે)

પ્રારંભિક તથા પ્રવેશિકા પ્રથમ



(આલેખ તથા સ્વર વાદ્યના વિદ્યાર્થીઓ માટે)

સૌ. સુધા દિ. પટવર્ધન

શ્રી.એ., સંગીતરત્ન, સંગીત અલંકાર, સંગીત શિક્ષાવિશારદ  
આચાર્ય- જીવનભારતી સંગીત વિદ્યાલય, સુરત

Figure 3

First year textbook for Jeevan Bharati School written by Sudhaben Patwardhan  
[mentioned in text on page 113]







The couple is founder and owner of well known “Raagam” a School of Music located in Vapi, Gujarat, established in 2003 specially for the development of Indian Classical Music, Light classical and sugam sangeet and other categories in the field of music.

The Institute is focused in teaching young artist how to sing and play musical instruments. This institute has it's own Examination centre known as VARNANURAAG, affiliated by Bruhad Gujarat Sangeet Samiti Board. The trained students have started stage performances in India and abroad and many of them have won National level competitions held by Bal Shree, Delhi. and other youth festivals and school level competitions.

The students learn not only music but they learn how to get peace of mind through music in their hectic life. They feel purity in their breath with the regular practice of music.



Figure 4

Promotional Material for Shyamal and Gargi Bhatt’s School of Music in Vapi, Gujarat (handwritten portion written by the Bhatt’s)  
[mentioned in text on page 131]



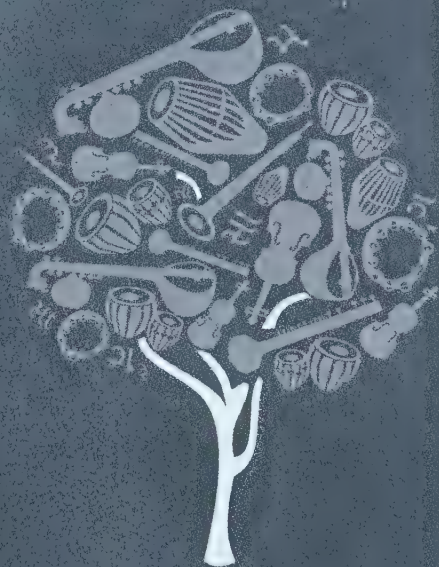
## About Indian Classical Music

Indian classical music, which has its origins as a meditation tool for attaining self-realization is one of the most complex and complete musical systems ever developed. It is based melodically on particular 'ragas' and rhythmically on 'talas'. The two main genres of Indian classical music are 'Hindustani' classical music (originated from North India), and 'Carnatic' music (originated from South India).

*Hindustani classical music* is an Indian classical music tradition that goes back to the Vedic times (around 1000 B.C.). Hindustani classical music was not only influenced by ancient Hindu musical traditions, Vedic philosophy and native Indian sounds but also enriched by the Persian performance practices of the Mughals. In Hindustani classical music, a '*gharana*' is a system of social organization linking musicians or dancers by lineage and/or apprenticeship, and by adherence to a particular musical style.

*Carnatic music* is based on historical developments that can be traced to the 15th–16th centuries A.D. and thereafter. The main emphasis in Carnatic music is on vocal music. Most compositions are written to be sung, and even when played on instruments, they are meant to be performed in '*gayaki*' (singing) style. Carnatic music tends to be significantly more structured than Hindustani music and Carnatic raga elaborations are generally much faster in tempo and shorter than their equivalents in Hindustani music.

Dr. Kar. Smiti  
**Sūrotsav**  
2010



Surat Municipal Corporation  
Manager, Seva Sadan  
Gandhinagar, Ahmedabad, India  
Mumbai, India




In Association With  
The National Centre

Rhythmic Nature

Figure 5

The cover of the program for Surotsav  
[mentioned in text on page 174]






### The Invitation

As spring sets on the banks of river Tapi, the maestros of Indian classical music set foot in the city to perform amidst the nostalgic beauty of Jawaharlal Nehru Garden, or what we popularly know as Chaupati Baug.

With legends like Dr. N. Rajam, Pandit Rajan and Sajan Mishra and Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt performing, it will be an honour to witness their splendid performance. We cordially invite you to experience three compelling nights of this glorious event, which we call 'Surotsav' – Surat city's own festival of 'swaras'.

S. Aparna IAS  
Municipal Commissioner, SMC


### The Programme

1 <sup>st</sup> April 2010 Thursday	Dr. N. Rajam, w/ Dr. Sangeeta Kum. Nandini & Kum. Ragini Shankar Violin
2 <sup>nd</sup> April 2010 Friday	Pt. Raajan & Saajan Mishra, Vocal-jugalbandi
3 <sup>rd</sup> April 2010 Saturday	Pt. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt & Salil Bhatt, 'Mohan' Veena

1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> April 2010

Venue: Jawaharlal Nehru Garden (Chaupati), Athwalines

Time: 8 p.m. Onwards



### The Guest of Honour

**PRESIDENT**

**Shri Ranjitbhai Giltwala**  
Hon'ble Mayor

**CHIEF GUESTS OF HONOUR**

**Shri Narottambhai Patel**  
Minister of Panchayats, Rural Housing, Rural Development, Food & Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Gujarat State

**Shrimati Darshnaben Jardosh**  
Member of Parliament

**Shri Pravinbhai Naik**  
Member of Parliament

**Shri C. R. Patil**  
Member of Parliament

**SPECIAL GUESTS**

**Shri Kishorbhai Vankawala**  
MLA, Surat

**Shri Nanubhai Vanani**  
MLA, Surat

**Shri Kiritbhai Patel**  
MLA, Surat

**Shri Kishorbhai Kanani (Kumar)**  
Deputy Mayor

**Shri Mukeshbhai Dalal**  
Chairman, Standing Committee

**Shri Bhimjibhai Patel**  
Leader, Ruling Party

Figure 6

The program for Surotsav



















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